No. 737 FEB. 11, 1911 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE MARK OF A CIRCLE

Evidently the men that inhabited the house had no fear of interruption from without. Nick raised the window and stepped into the room.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 *Seventh Ave., N. Y.*
Copyright, 1911, by STREET & SMITH.
No. 737. NEW YORK February, 11, 1911. Price Five Cents.

THE MARK OF A CIRCLE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Seven Sworn Enemies.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE MYSTERY IN CHALK.

"There is another one, Patsy."

Nick Carter came to an abrupt halt, indicating, as he did so, a circle that had been drawn upon the concrete pavement with red chalk. It was not more than eighteen inches in diameter, and it was divided in half by a straight line across it, also in red. Just above this equatorial line there was an inscription made in white chalk, while below it there was still another one, in blue.

"Odd, isn't it?" remarked the detective, when Patsy, his second assistant, made no reply.

Patsy nodded.

"I don't see that the appearance of this one changes the opinion we both expressed in regard to the other," he said.

For a moment Nick did not reply to this remark, but continued to study the chalk marks on the pavement in front of him.

"Boys, of course," he said presently. "Boys are eternally marking the pavements, balustrades, and front steps of houses with chalk, particularly during the first few weeks after school begins in the fall; and yet——"

He paused again, and Patsy, after waiting a moment, inquired:

"And yet, what?"

The detective pointed toward the chalk marks.

"There is a difference between this mark and the other one," he said.

"Yes," replied Patsy, with a grin; "several blocks difference."

"More than that. Do you see no other difference?"

"Yes; the dividing mark in this circle is directly across it, while in the other one, it was up and down. The figures on each side of the dividing line are different, too; but I don't see that that makes any particular difference, save that it expresses a different fancy in the mind of the boy who made the marks."

They were standing at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twelfth Street—the southwest corner, to be exact—in the city of New York. They had approached the corner from the south—from Washington Square—and had discovered that other mark to which they had referred, there.

Now, when Patsy made the remark in reference to the bisecting of the circles they had seen, the detective waved his hand toward Sixth Avenue, down Twelfth Street; and he asked:

"Suppose we had come through Twelfth Street, from Sixth Avenue, and had discovered this mark without having seen the other one—you would have said, then, that the dividing line of this circle was across it, wouldn't you?"

"Very possibly. It would have been across it, in that case, according to the direction in which we would have been walking."

"Exactly; and if we had, later, approached the first circle we saw, from the side street, the dividing line of that one would have been up and down, for the same reason; eh?"

"Sure; but——"

"It is all in the difference of the direction from which you approach it, eh?"

"Certainly."

"While the fact remains that the first circle in chalk that we saw was divided by a line drawn north and south, while this one is divided by a line drawn east and west."

"Correct; I think you may take your place at the head of the class, chief," replied the assistant, with another one of his expansive grins.

But the detective paid no attention to the levity of his assistant; he was still giving his attention to the marks on the pavement. Suddenly he asked:

"Do you remember what was inside that other circle, Patsy? The one down at the square?"

"Yes. To the left of the dividing line—that is, to the west of it—there were figures made with white chalk."

"What figures, if you recall them?"

"Three, a plus sign, and three again."

"Precisely. Now, three plus three make six, if I am not mistaken."

"You surely do belong at the head of the class, chief."

"And those figures were at the corner of Sixth Street, which is Washington Square North, while now we are at the corner of Twelfth Street, which is six blocks distant. Three plus three equals six."

"Correct."

"Do you recall what was to the right of that dividing line? to the east of it?"

"Down at the square? Yes. The letter R, in blue. What of it?"

"Merely this: If the marks on the pavement were intended to give directions to a person, or persons, whose duty it was to discover them, the figures and the letters, and their position inside the circle, must be significant."

"Quite so; but don't you think, chief, that the idea you suggest is rather far-fetched?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then, what is the use of bothering ourselves about it?"

"Merely because I find that it interests me—and also because my first almost unformed guess about it has been correct."

"Eh? What was that?"

"Don't you remember that I stopped and took particular notice of that other mark of the circle?"

"Yes."

"Well, it struck me that the circle was very perfectly drawn, for an ordinary schoolboy who was young enough to care for that sort of amusement; also that the two figures three had been made by a mature hand, and one that was practiced in making figures, rather than by a little chap from school—and the letter R, in blue, was by no means the work of one whose handwriting has not been formed."

"So, you told yourself that the thing had been done by a man, or a woman, and not by a boy, as we agreed at the first sight of it?"

"No; not quite so emphatic as that."

"What then?"

"Without forming the thought that occurred to me into words, I, nevertheless, did look for a second signal in chalk, that would be discovered six doors farther along, or six blocks, or——"

"Why not six miles, chief?"

"Because that would be much too far," replied the detective, without smiling; "and, Patsy, if you are not interested, you may go on up the avenue without me. Even if this should turn out to mean nothing at all, I find that it interests me; and it wouldn't be the only time that we have discovered chalk marks in the streets that have meant a great deal."

"I beg your pardon, chief. I was only poking fun; but honestly, I don't see anything in it save the pranks of a mischievous boy."

"More than likely that is all there is in it; but sometimes one can learn a lot by the study of the pranks of mischievous boys."

"Sure thing. I admit all that."

"And if the members of the police force could read

correctly all the signs that are written in the streets of New York City, there would be no need of a detective bureau."

"I never thought of that; but it's as sure as we're alive, chief."

"Now give your attention to this particular circular diagram, if you are quite done with levity; otherwise——"

"Oh, I'm through. I'll be good," expostulated Patsy.

"Because even if we are following the pranks of some boys, we are likely to find that they are mischievous pranks that had better be stopped."

"Like a 'Robber's Cave,' eh, or something of that sort?" asked the irrepressible Patsy, trying hard to repress another grin.

"Yes," replied Nick Carter seriously; "and I'll tell you right now, Patsy, that I would rather be instrumental in stopping a boy, or a group of boys, who had started out along a line that would lead to malicious mischief, than to pursue and arrest the most hardened criminal in New York. However, I do not think that those circles on the pavement were made by boys. I have altered my opinion as to that."

"What, then?"

"Patsy, both circles that we have seen have been drawn in red chalk by a grown person, man, or woman; in my opinion, by a man. And if a man does that sort of thing in the streets of a city like New York, he surely has a distinct motive in so doing."

"I guess that goes without saying."

"Now, take particular notice of this circular drawing."

"I have already done so."

"The line across it is from east to west, or vice versa."

"Yes."

"Above the line, in white, is the figure four; and below the line is the letter S."

"I see them."

"Notice the figure four. The lines come together at the top as a draftsman would make that figure; no boy ever did it like that; no boy ever makes a figure four in that manner. And the letter S, in blue chilk, is quickly and skillfully made."

"Admitted. But, supposing the marks we have seen were made by a man, what did he mean by them?"

"Now you have asked the question that I have been asking myself, since I discovered this second mark; and we will try to find out; at least, I will. If it doesn't interest you, you need not remain."

"Oh, I'll stay, thank you."

"Suppose, then, that the intersection of the circle is to indicate the direction in which we are to go, from here—that is, to the east, or toward the west; that is, again, to the right, or to the left."

"Uh-huh; well?"

"If we hark back to that other mark, and remember that the letter R was at the right of the straight line, it might have meant that when we arrived at the next mark we were to turn to the right."

"The letter inside of this circle is an S; and the figure is a four. Now, four blocks to the right would mean—let's see: There is University Place, Broadway, Fourth Avenue—it would take us to Third Avenue. Do you mean, chief, that you are going to follow up this thing?"

"Yes. For a little while—for the interest I feel in it."

CHAPTER II.

A PUZZLE IN LETTERS AND FIGURES.

"Wait just a minute, chief," said Patsy, as they were about to start onward. "An idea has occurred to me."

"What is it?"

"Well, if we are going to imagine a lot of impossible things about a few simple chalk marks, why not go the whole hog in the matter?"

"What do you mean by that, Patsy?"

"This: If those marks were put down on the pavement by a designing person, with intent to lead some person or persons——"

"Patsy, if you are not to consider this thing seriously at all, you may as well go along home."

"I'm in dead earnest, chief; honest."

"Go on, then, with what you were saying."

"If by any chance the marks have got a significance, why not study out the significance first?"

"Time enough to do that after we have discovered several more of the marks—which we should do if they have any direct meaning at all."

"Well, then, if we should discover several more of them and do decide that they have a direct meaning of some sort, and that the meaning is sinister, why not presuppose that the man who made them, or some agent of his, is even now watching these marks, to see who will discover them?"

"That idea is not unlikely, or it may be extremely unlikely. Anyhow, we won't bother about that part of it just now; we will see where the marks lead us—if there happen to be any more of them."

"And do you expect to discover a third mark, like this one, at the corner of Twelfth Street and Third Avenue?"

"It would not surprise me to find one there; and it wouldn't surprise me if I did not."

"According to your theory, this letter—the letter S, that is underneath the dividing line in this circle—should refer to our direction after we have discovered the next mark, if there is a next one?"

"Yes."

"What would it mean, then? It could not mean right, or left."

"It might mean south."

"True; but in that case, why not an E, here, instead of an R?"

"Give it up, Patsy."

"It looks to me, chief, as if we are pretending that we are boys, and are indulging in a game of 'Follow My Leader.'"

"A good idea, Patsy. Let's do that very thing. It is Sunday afternoon, and there isn't anything in particular to occupy our attention just now. We may as well follow out this thing, as to amuse ourselves in any other way. We have more than two hours of daylight to play the game: so, come on."

They started toward the east, through Twelfth Street, then, walking briskly, and both were more or less amused by the circumstance.

It should be said right here that Nick Carter's habit of taking notice of all things that came under his observation, no matter how trivial they might appear to be at first, was entirely responsible for the interest he felt in the chalk marks on the pavement.

Also, that it did not even remotely occur to him that he was on the track of any crime, or of a contemplated one; or, in fact, on the track of anything at all that was to prove worthy of his attention.

His analytical mind accepted any sort of a puzzle, and conceived the idea of working it out, as naturally as the mind of a professor in mathematics seizes upon an abtruse problem in algebra.

That first circle in chalk that he had discovered at the corner of Washington Square North, and Fifth Avenue—the northwest corner it was—had attracted him only because it was so perfectly made, and because the figures three plus three, and the letter R, had had the appearance of the work of a mature hand and mind.

As he strolled on up the avenue after the discovery, he had kept them in mind, and, half unconsciously, had looked for another sign like the first one, six blocks away.

He had found it, and hence his sudden interest—not with any idea that the signs would lead to any crime, or was the work of any criminal, but simply and solely with the thought that the signs did present a puzzle which he would like to read to the end.

As a matter of fact he was starting out on the trail of one of the most remarkable experiences in his career; but, of course, he had no idea of that.

Had he been able, at that moment, to read the true significance of these chalk-drawn circles, utter amazement and eagerness would have marked his attitude, which was, instead, merely one of abstract interest; and Patsy, had he understood what sort of a trail they had entered upon, would have chased that grin from his features, and have assumed an air of apprehensive interest not at all in keeping with the present circumstance.

Nevertheless, both were silent as they made their way eastward—and both stood for a time in utter silence when they arrived at the southwest corner of Third Avenue and the same street—Twelfth—and discovered, directly in their path, a third circle drawn in chalk and intersected and numbered and lettered as the others had been.

"What do you think of it now, Patsy?" asked Nick, at last.

"It is becoming interesting."

"One sign certainly seems to lead us to another sign, in each case."

"It sure does."

"And here the intersecting line inside the circle is again across our path; that is, north and south."

"So I see."

"The figures, in white, have undergone another change, too."

"Yes; this time they are nine, a minus sign, and then six."

"And the letter in blue is a W."

"Which, according to your theory, should mean west."

"The letter, we have discovered, always refers to the next sign beyond."

"Yes."

"Well, the last one was S, so let us turn south, to

Ninth Street. You see, nine, minus six, leaves three, and if we have read the letters and the figures correctly, we should find another circle marked on the pavement at the corner of Ninth Street, and should turn to the west again when we get there."

"That is the manner in which they have directed us, thus far, all right."

They walked more rapidly this time, and quickly arrived at the corner of Ninth Street.

There were no chalk marks there, nor at any one of the four corners.

"The trail seems to have played out," said Patsy.

"No," replied Nick. "It is only made more difficult. Now, let me think a minute. Most any person, finding those signs as we found them, might get the idea of following them, eh?"

"Might; but it isn't likely."

"Might do so; that is the point."

"Well?"

"Having found a third one, as we have done, it would become necessary that the leader in the game should make the trail more difficult. Now, how would he do that?"

"Give it up," said Patsy.

"He might go by contraries."

"Eh? How is that?"

"Nine minus six might indicate nine plus six, or fifteen."

"Or nine times six, which is fifty-four."

"Hardly that."

"Well, fifteen blocks south is going to take us pretty well downtown on the East Side, chief. Why not figure on the letters going by contraries?"

"Do you mean the S, in the second circle meaning north, instead of south?"

"Yes."

"We'll try it. We will go back, and on to Fifteenth Street."

"And if we don't find any marks there——"

"We'll go home."

But they did discover a fourth circle, but this time it was so entirely different, so far as the figures and the lettering was concerned, from any of the other three, that they both stood in silent contemplation of it for a long time; and, moreover, the location of the circle had been changed, for this time it had been drawn at the southeast corner of the avenue and street.

"The fellow seems to have done some rather tall figuring this time," said Patsy, at last breaking the silence; "and lettering, too."

"Yes," replied the detective. "I was trying to figure out what it all means."

"Got any ideas?"

"The intersecting line is east and west again, so we are to go either east or west from here."

"Always provided that the line itself doesn't go by contraries, this time. First thing we know that chap will be asking us to square that circle, or straighten it."

"Three, multiplied by five, multiplied by five, multiplied by four, plus thirty," said the detective, reading aloud the figures in white chalk within one-half of the circle. "That makes three hundred and thirty-eight, Patsy; and there are two letters with two small figures under them; the figures two, minus two."

"And the letters are T and F," said Patsy. "What do they mean?"

"I'm afraid that I will have to do as you did a little while ago, give it up," said the detective, with a smile.

But Nick Carter took an envelope from one of his pockets, and upon the back of it he made with his pencil a copy from memory of each of the other three circles they had discovered that afternoon, and then an exact copy of the one in front of them.

"What are you going to do?" asked Patsy.

"I shall amuse myself this evening by trying to work out this puzzle," replied the detective. "It interests me more than I thought. There is a key to it somewhere."

"Unless, as we first supposed, some boy has been amusing himself. I'll admit that the letters and figures don't look like the work of a boy; but big boys sometimes like to delight themselves with childish pranks. This looks to me like one of them."

"Probably it is," returned the detective. "Come along, anyhow. We won't bother about this any more, here. It can be worked out quite as well at home, as here, and the chalk marks won't disappear, even if it should rain to-night. They will last through a hard rain."

"You mean to look further into this, chief?"

"Yes, if my puzzling about it at home to-night suggests anything."

"What could it suggest?"

"Patsy, if I could answer that I wouldn't turn homeward, now; I'd keep right on. I've got a sort of hunch that these several circles mean something, but I haven't any more idea what they can mean than you have; possibly not so much."

CHAPTER III.

A MAN WHO WAS WANTED.

Right here it becomes necessary that we should anticipate, somewhat, the investigations of Nick Carter and his assistant, in regard to the mysterious circles in chalk. The adoption of such a source rounds out the story rather better and gives the reader to understand something about what Nick Carter was really up against, when the chalk-mark circles were first discovered.

Of course we are not giving away the other end of the story; we are only retailing, somewhat in advance, information which the detective soon possessed.

It will be remembered that when the detective and his second assistant discovered the first of the marked circles—or, the one which he supposed to be the first—at the corner of Washington Square North and Fifth Avenue, it was approximately three o'clock of a Sunday afternoon.

If you, reader, had been standing at that corner nine hours earlier, that is, at six in the morning of that same day, and had been particularly noticing things that happened in that neighborhood, you would have seen a man cross the square diagonally from the southeast, and you would have noticed that he came to a stop at the corner in question, where he bent forward and became busily occupied for a moment or two.

You would have seen that he made some marks upon the pavement with an object that he held in his hand, and later, if you had gone to that spot, you would have discovered what Nick Carter and Patsy saw, at three that afternoon.

You would have discovered the mysterious circle in red with the intersecting line from north to south inside of it, with the figures three, plus, three, in white, to the left of the line, and the letter R, in blue, to the right of it.

Having discovered those things in time, naturally you would have followed the stranger, unseen if possible; and let us suppose that you succeeded in doing so.

You would have seen him stop at the southwest corner of Twelfth Street, where he made the second circle; you would have followed him to Third Avenue and Twelfth Street, where the third one was drawn upon the pavement, and thence to the southwest corner of Fifteenth Street and Third Avenue, where the fourth circle, with its many figures and letters, was made.

And that, as we now know, was where the detective abandoned the pursuit for the day.

But you, having the man in view, would not have done that; you would have followed him onward, giving little or no heed to the chalk-marked circles themselves, and devoting all your attention to the man who made them.

You would have seen him turn deliberately along Fifteenth Street toward Second Avenue, where presently he entered the vestibule of one of the flat houses on that block—and if you could have enveloped yourself in an invisible cloak, you might have pursued him into a four-room flat at the top of the house, at the rear, where he did nothing more reprehensible at the moment than to strip himself of his clothing and tumble into bed.

To say that the man slept the sleep of the just would be not strictly correct; but it is certain that he slept soundly, nevertheless, until noon that day; and that when he arose, he dressed himself with exceeding care after he had prepared and partaken of a frugal breakfast of rolls and coffee.

Several of the morning papers had been left at his door, and he looked them over hastily, seeming to be in search of some particular item, rather than to demand the general news which they contained.

And, at last, in one of them, he discovered what he had evidently been searching for, because he read the small item several times over, with great care, before he cast the paper from him, and with a scowl upon his handsome face stared through the window at nothing.

The item which he had read was as follows:

"Every precinct station house within the limits of Greater New York was notified at twelve o'clock last night of the presence in the city of the notorious William Peiper, alias Billy Pepper, alias Handsome Billy, alias Billy Slick—by which last-mentioned name he is more generally known, especially to the police, the two names being sometimes transposed into Slick Billy. It will be remembered that this man escaped from prison in another State, six months ago, and that not a trace of him has been discovered since; then until he suddenly made his appearance in New York, yesterday; nor would his presence have been suspected, even then, had he not rashly interfered in defense of a woman who had been affronted by a masher at the corner of Broadway and Tenth Street. Billy knocked the masher down, and was seen and recognized by a department-store detective, who rushed out to lend his assistance; but the escaped convict disappeared in the crowd that gathered, before attention could be called to him.

"Billy Slick is wanted by the police, not merely because he is an escaped convict, but because of several untried indictments which are still hanging over him. He is known as the smoothest, slickest, and most gifted member of that fraternity which is known as the Un-

derworld, and there is a reward of five thousand dollars standing for his capture. A copy of his picture will be supplied to-day to each and every policeman on the force."

This article had found its way into only one paper, and that had been obtained by accident, because the police reporter for that particular paper had been somewhat belated in finishing up his assignment for the night.

Billy Peiper—or Billy Slick, as we prefer to call him here, continued to gaze out of the window with the scowl upon his handsome face for several minutes.

But, after a time, the frown gave place to a smile which was followed by a shrug of the shoulders, after which he lighted a cigar and remarked to the open window through which he was gazing:

"I suppose I was a fool to let myself go as I did. I might have known that I would be seen and recognized; but, all the same, I'm not sorry. I can't look on and see a woman insulted, without raising a hand. I haven't sunk quite so low as that."

Whereas, upon giving expression to that somewhat remarkable remark, he laughed aloud.

But therein spoke the pronounced characteristic of Billy Slick.

He could "jimmy" anything from a coalhole in the pavement to the French windows of a modern palace without compunction; he could copy another man's signature on a check, and pass it without a qualm of conscience; he could shoot to maim, or to kill, if necessary, and feel no regrets if his own liberty or life hung in the balance, and he could perform any of the functions of an expert crook with a masterly hand, directed by a masterly brain, and then congratulate himself upon the excellent quality of his work; but he could not, and would not, stand by and see a woman insulted, or even affronted, without interfering, no matter what the consequences might be.

And such was the man who had made the marks upon the pavement, which Nick Carter and Patsy had discovered.

In figure he was tall and well proportioned, suggesting the trained athlete who had run to symmetry and alertness, quickness and skill, rather than to bunches of muscle.

In dress he was immaculate and correct, from the crown of his shapely head to the soles of his perfectly shod feet.

In manner he was always a Chesterfield, and more than once he had given ample proof of the fact that he was as much at home in a drawing room as in the back room of a thieves' dive on the lower East Side—or vice versa.

In speech he was correct and gifted, although he could be as rough and uncouth as any of his less-educated companions, if occasion demanded; and his voice could be rendered as soft and cooing as a woman's.

In face he was handsome, as has been said. His features were most perfectly formed, his teeth were good, his hair was a wavy brown that was almost black, his eyes were a grayish-blue and were very large, round, and expressive, provided with the long lashes that would have fitted better the face of a woman.

Such was Billy Slick.

At three o'clock that afternoon he was still seated near the window, still smoking, when a soft tap against the panels of the door announced that somebody had called.

Billy called out carelessly, and without altering his attitude:

"Come in."

The door opened slowly and noiselessly, for Billy had purposely left the latch off it. A shock head of hair of a fiery red made its appearance in the aperture thus created, and this was followed gradually, as with a gliding motion, by a pair of shoulders of enormous width, a huge body, if we consider only muscular development, set upon a pair of legs that were much too short to be in proportion—in the person of one whom Billy immediately addressed as Snake.

Now, Snake is not an attractive name, but, nevertheless, the owner of it grinned as he closed the door with the same care for silence that he had observed in opening it, and came, absolutely without noise, across the room.

It was this ability of his to move without creating the slightest sound that had given Snake his name in crookdom—and he had been careful to put the latch upon the door, too, as he closed it.

"Three o'clock," he said, still grinning; and his voice, although perfectly audible to Billy Slick, would not have penetrated to the adjoining room with the door between them ajar.

"Correct, Snake; you're on time," replied Billy. "You always have been. That is why I like you. Sit down and help yourself to a cigar."

Before complying, Snake glanced cautiously around him.

"Everything to the good, here?" he asked, in the same cautious tone of voice.

"Yes. Make yourself easy, Snake."

"Have the cops got wise to your being back?"

"I'm sorry to say that I think they have, Snake; but it couldn't be helped," replied Billy. "It couldn't be helped."

"That's bad, Slick. Another woman, I suppose; eh?"

"Yes; and the worst of it is that I didn't know her from Adam—Eve, rather; but I did know the gun who insulted her."

"A gun, eh?"

"Yes. One of Hefty's mob of lifters."

"Uh-huh; I suppose you smashed him, Slick? Say, you can be about seventeen different kinds of a——"

"That will do, Snake. We won't discuss that part of it. You have done well to keep a date with me that was made nearly two years ago. Because I had the misfortune to save your worthless life, Snake, you have chosen to consider yourself as my uncompromising pal. Does that go the limit, Snake?"

"The limit, and then some. Go as far as you like, Slick."

"All right."

"Say, Slick, when I found them chalk marks just where you said they'd be, I could have hugged you good and plenty right there."

"Heaven forbid, Snake. Your hug would be like a grizzly bear. Well, what have you got on hand to report to me?"

"Just exactly what I agreed to report to you; no more and no less, although there can easily be more, if you want them."

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE PLOT.

Billy Slick was silent for a moment, thinking; then he replied:

"No, Snake, I don't want any more than I mentioned when we made the arrangement. With five besides ourselves, we make seven, and if you have been as careful in your selections as I told you to be——"

"I have; you can bet your last dollar on that."

"That wouldn't be plunging very heavily," returned the leader, with a light laugh. "I am pretty low in funds. I've had to keep so much in the shade since—since I quit boarding with the State that I haven't had much chance to replenish the coffers."

"Well, I've got about three thousand. You can have that," said Snake, with simple directness.

"All right; and thanks; but I think we'd better get busy and acquire a working capital before we attempt anything else, Snake. I've got a plan for that, too. We'll get at it as soon as I know what you have done in the big thing."

"Is it a big thing?" asked Snake, his small eyes snapping.

"The biggest ever—when we have carried it off. Now, tell me, who are the five men?"

"Two of them you know, Slick. Big Duffy and The Count."

"Yes; I know them; but I don't know how far they can be trusted, Snake."

"As far as you like—with me in the bunch," was the significant rejoinder.

"That's all right, then," carelessly. "How about the others?"

"You don't know them, I reckon; but you know about them."

"Well?"

"There is Ikey, the Jew, who can't be beat in his line, and——"

"Just what is his line?"

"Say, he's a human bottle of oil, he is! He can play any part from a parson to a rabbi, and do it as slick as grease, within his limits as to appearance. And there is a lot more, too, that he does, just as well."

"Go on with the list."

"There is Bob Breaker, and then, last but not least, except in size, The Mouse."

"Oh; The Mouse. I know something about him. There will be something in his line, all right; but what do you know about Bob Breaker?"

"I reckon I'm about the only man that can handle Breaker, with that infernal temper of his'n. That is his only failing, but between us we can hold that down—and there might be a time when it will come in handy at that."

Billy Slick nodded.

"Have you instructed them how to find us?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes."

"How did you do it?"

"Just as you told me."

"Tell me, so that I will know that you got it straight. I don't want any mistakes to happen, now."

"Well, I told them to go to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-ninth Street for the first sign, and beginning with Big Duffy, who goes there at six, to-night, they are due an hour apart; they find the first direction at the southeast corner, the second at the northeast corner, the third at the northwest corner,

and the fourth and last, at the southwest corner. How's that?"

"Correct as far as it goes. Go on, Snake."

"I went to Fifth Avenue and the square, as you directed, and found the first circle. Then I beat it for Twenty-ninth Street and made the marks."

"Made them how? I want to be sure that you were correct."

"Southeast corner, small circle with an S inside of it; northeast corner, small circle with a nine inside of it; northwest corner, a circle with an eight inside of it; southwest corner, a circle with a cross inside of it. How's that?"

"Correct—if you explained the meanings to them so they will understand."

"I told them that the letter at the southeast corner would give the direction; that the figures on the northeast and northwest corners, added together, would give the distance in the number of blocks, and that the sign inside the circle at the southwest corner would tell them which corner to look upon for the next sign."

"That's all right—if they understood it."

"They couldn't help that. The S means south; nine and eight are seventeen, and seventeen from twenty-nine, leaves twelve——"

"That is the second corner where I left the circle, Snake."

"Well, what of it? It saves time——"

"But, they will go wrong. They won't get the contraries."

"Gee! I never thought of that."

"You'll have to skip right out now, and add six to one of those numbers, Snake."

"Time enough. I'll go in a few minutes or in a little while—before Big Duffy shows up at the corner of Twenty-ninth Street."

"You see," said Slick, "it is necessary that they begin at the right corner, or they will go all wrong."

"I understand. I clean forgot that part of it."

"Well, now, let me ask you a question."

"Go ahead."

"Suppose I had put the first circle I made at the northeast corner of the square and the avenue, instead of at the northwest corner; how would you have marked your last circle at Twenty-ninth Street?"

"With two crosses, meaning, go back two corners for the place when you get to the next direction; and if you had made your first mark at the southwest corner—which there is none, by the way, just where you did make it, I'd have left the circle unmarked."

"Correct, Snake. I see you understood me, all right."

"Yes; but I don't see why you couldn't have told me two years ago, which corner you'd put the first mark on; as it happened the square was the last one of the four you mentioned, that I examined. I had begun to think that you'd been pinched."

"You see, I couldn't tell which place I could get at without danger. I couldn't see two years ahead, to know what would be doing by now."

"Well, it's all right as it lays. Now, what is the big game?"

"Nick Carter is the big game, Snake."

"Hey? What's that?" cried the red-headed Snake, in astonishment.

"You heard me, didn't you?"

"Sure thing. But, what the blazes——"

"Snake, I'm not a bloodthirsty individual, although I'd shoot, I suppose, as soon as the next one, if I was cornered. All the same, I've got it in for Nick Carter, and I'm going to get square."

"Put him out, eh? Put out his light, is it? Say, Slick, I'm not in love with Nick Carter, or with any gum-shoe cop, for that matter, but all the same I'm not much stuck on the murder business; not me!"

The other man laughed softly.

"Yes, Snake," he replied calmly, narrowing his big eyes, "I intend to put him out, and to put out his light, too—but not at all in the manner you suggest. There is to be no killing in this game. But, even if there was, you're in for the limit, so you told me."

"I know. That's why you got my goat. I'm no killer, Slick."

"You'd have stuck just the same, wouldn't you?" asked Slick tensely.

"When I say I'll stick, I stick. You needn't worry; but, all the same, I'm pleased that there ain't to be any stiff in this game."

"Not a bit of it."

"What then?"

"Snake I've got the sweetest little plot, all cooked and done brown, that you ever heard of. By carrying it out to a finish, as I can do with the aid of yourself and the five men you have summoned. Did I ever tell you that I studied medicine once and graduated, too?"

"Uh-huh; I reckon you've studied most things, some."

"So I have; medicine particularly. I've found the knowledge handy, more than once, too."

"Well?"

"Do you remember what put the smartest crook that ever lived—George Canterbury—out of business, Snake?"

"Oh, he was a morphine fiend, and that sort are never any good."

"Exactly. Well, if morphine can put a crook out of business it can also do the same service for a detective, can't it?"

"Say, Slick, what the blazes do you mean?"

"I mean that I am going to do a lasting service to the Underworld, and to all crookdom particularly, by making a morphine fiend of Nick Carter. That's what!"

For a moment the red-headed, squat, but burly Snake stared in amazement. Then he grinned. Then he slapped his knee.

"Tell me about it," was all he said.

"First," said Billy Slick, "we've got to get the man; it's the old recipe about cooking a hare, you know."

"Uh-huh."

"But that can be done with a properly laid trap, sprung at the right moment."

"Oh, I ain't got any call to doubt that, with you to boss things. Go on."

"When I get Carter nicely in my power I shall take him to a place that is all ready, now, to receive him. I shall begin on him by dosing him, hypodermically, with small doses of morphine, increasing the amount gradually, and taking time enough to make a regular fiend of him. As I will keep him utterly helpless, he won't be able to resist, and he will ultimately become as much a slave to it as if he had taken it voluntarily. When I get him up to twenty grains three times in twenty-four hours I'll turn him loose again; but——"

Billy Slick came to a dead stop, and smiled meaningly.

"But what?" demanded Snake, his eyes popping with interest.

Slick leaned forward nearer to his companion and said, in a lower tone—not for caution as much as for emphasis:

"When I get him to the point where he cannot do without the drug, I intend to make him buy every grain of it that he gets shot into him—at a big price per grain, too."

"Holly gee!" exclaimed Snake, in undoubted admiration.

"Nick Carter is said to be worth considerable more than a million dollars now," Slick continued smilingly. "When I have had him under my care for a time, and he begins to want the drug rather badly, I'll charge him only about ten dollars a grain for it; gradually I shall increase the price to fifty, and a hundred dollars a grain—and toward the last, when he simply has got to have it, it will cost him as high as a thousand dollars a grain. Don't you know that a regular morphine fiend will sell his soul for the drug when he gets to a certain point?"

"Sure."

"Well, if we don't bleed Nick Carter of close to three or four hundred thousand, and do it without the slightest danger to ourselves, I miss my guess. That is the game, Snake. Now, what do you think of it?"

"Think of it! Why, it's the slickest thing in a thousand years!"

CHAPTER V.

BEGINNING A CONSPIRACY.

One more chapter in reference to the preliminary industry of Billy Slick and his followers, and then we will return to Nick Carter and his study of the circles in chalk, with the incomprehensible marks inside of them.

It will be remembered that Slick told Snake that he would have to return to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-ninth Street to add six to his figures made there, so that the other five of the group of crooks would not get mixed in their directions.

The conversation just recorded began at three in the afternoon; at four, or soon after it, Snake went out to perform his errand, which would inform Big Duffy and his pals that they must go twenty-three blocks south for their first sign, instead of only seventeen.

He did that by rubbing out the figure nine, and substituting fifteen in its place; and then he took his way slowly down the avenue, strolling along leisurely, for he felt more at ease along that thoroughfare than he would have done on any other street in the city.

He remembered, too, that it was quite a time since he had taken a walk down Fifth Avenue, and he amused himself by looking at the buildings, and speculating that before he and Billy Peiper were through with Nick Carter, they would have enough of the detective's wealth to purchase one of the houses, if it were desired.

He turned into Fifteenth Street toward the east, going more warily, and dodging every officer who came within his range of vision—and it happened that he

was less than half a block away when he discovered Nick Carter and Patsy studying the chalk marks that Slick had made at the southeast corner of Third Avenue and Fifteenth Street.

This was the last of the circles that Nick and Patsy discovered; the last one that Billy Slick had made, in fact.

Snake came to a halt; he stepped backward into a doorway, partly out of sight, and kept wary eyes upon the two men who studied the chalk marks; as yet he had no idea who they were.

Then he saw them start away from the corner and move directly toward him; and he lost no time in sinking upon the steps where he stood, and in half covering his face with his hands while he rested his elbows on his knees.

Even then Nick Carter gave one sharp glance toward Snake as they passed him, but paid no more attention than that, and went on.

Snake remained where he was until Nick and Patsy had turned the corner of Third Avenue, but then he arose quickly and lost no time in getting back to the flat where Billy Slick was awaiting him.

"Say," he exclaimed, as soon as he was inside the door with it well closed against intruders, "I'm an honest man if Nick Carter and one of his assistants ain't piped us off already."

"What do you mean?" demanded Slick.

"Just what I say. They was out there——"

"Where?"

"At the corner, right out here, studying them marks to beat the band; they came up the avenue, too, as if they had followed along from the others, same as I did. Look here, Slick, do you suppose they could read them figures?"

"If it was really Nick Carter whom you saw, he will find a way to read them—provided he saw anything in them to interest him."

"Oh, he was interested, all right. There ain't any doubt of that."

"What makes you so sure about it?"

"Say, can you tell whether a man is hungry or not when you see him eat? Do you know that the wind is blowing if you see papers flying through the air?"

"Are you dead sure that the man was Nick Carter?"

"Ain't he put the kibosh onto me twice, and am I likely to forget him? Didn't he get me for four years and a half, the last time, and wasn't that little devil, Patsy, along with him? Oh, I ain't forgetting favors like them, Slick."

"Oh, well, it isn't likely that he began with the first circle at the square; and, unless he did that——"

"It's just as likely as not that he did; and if he did, he's onto the whole layout."

"All right. We will have to move, then; that's all. We'll go to the place I have fixed up to take him—when we get him; only——"

"Only we'll have to wait till we get him before we take him there, Slick. That trap of yours has got to be pretty close to the kind that is called a deadfall, to work."

"I was going to say," continued Slick calmly, as if his companion had not interrupted, "only we will have to wait till a few minutes past ten to-night before we start—and take our chances till then. Didn't you say that The Mouse is the last one on your list?"

"Yes."

"Big Duffy starts in at six, and so The Mouse won't get here before a quarter to half-past ten. We'll have to wait till then."

"It's a long while—with Nick Carter on the trail."

"We'll have to take the chance. You see, if you knew that your men were even in the city and had the least idea where to find them, it would be different. But you don't."

"I don't know that any of them are here. I don't know that any of them will be able to get to the corner of Twenty-ninth Street and read the signs there. Duffy had three more months to serve when I last saw him, four months ago—I don't know where a single one of them is. They may all be dead, for all I know about them. But, if they are alive and at liberty, you can bank on their being here, Slick."

"I know that, if you made the arrangements."

Slick glanced around at the walls of the room in which they were seated; then he smiled, and Snake, watching him, remarked:

"You'll be sorry to give up this place, won't you?"

"I have no idea of giving it up, Snake. I have kept it a good many years, and I don't intend to give it up now."

"But if Nick Carter should trail you to it?"

"He won't find me here, that is all—and he will be convinced that he has made a mistake at that."

"How is that?"

"I have two friends, an old man and wife, whose rent I pay in another house. When I am away they come here and live, if I want them to do so. They don't know me, or never heard about me, if anybody should ask them; and when I want the place back again I merely let them know, and they vacate. That is how I

was able, when you and I were both in prison, to make the arrangements to meet here—only I didn't want to give the number, then."

"I know."

"Sometimes a place burns down; or the old people might die; or anything might happen; so, with the chalk marks, if anything had happened, I had a way to direct you, anyhow. All the same," he added, after a moment more, "I will make arrangements to leave here as soon as The Mouse arrives—and to have the old couple here by then, too."

"And have the old couple see the other fellows, too?"

"Bless you, they're both blind when it comes to seeing things that interest me."

"Don't they know that you are a crook?"

"They never have told me that they know it."

"Well, they must be under rather a big obligation to you."

"Not so very big," replied Slick, with a shrug.

"One of your charitable acts, I suppose, Slick."

"Oh, drop it, Snake. I'm built as I'm built. If I help some people with one hand I hurt others with the other one, and it about evens itself up, I guess. I'm going out now. I won't be back till its time for The Mouse to get here. You can wait and receive the others."

"And also Nick Carter, if he shows up, eh?" said Snake, not without a touch of irony.

"You can wait outside if you're afraid," was the cool reply. "You know me well enough to understand that I never wanted to leave you in any danger that I wouldn't share, Snake. But I've got to go after the old people, and it will take me about all that time."

"Go ahead. I can take care of myself, even against Nick Carter."

No more was said on that point.

Both were men of few words, unless it referred to business in hand, and then of as few as possible.

At the door, as he was on the point of leaving, Billy Slick paused and said:

"Somehow I don't think that Carter will get here to-night; but I'll admit that he is more than likely to find it. He'll be studying up that circle business to-night."

"Uh-huh," replied Snake.

"If he found only the one out here he isn't likely to read it; if he found all of them he may work out the puzzle—but he will be too late when he does it, I'm thinking. So-long, Snake."

Snake was uneasy when he was left alone, but he stuck to his post—sitting in the dark with the door into the hall widely open, and with a loaded gun on a chair beside him.

From the position he occupied he could see the elevator every time it ascended to that floor, and each time it did so, he seized upon the gun and held it ready for instant use.

It is more than likely that if Nick Carter had read the puzzle that night, and had gone to that house in search of the rest of the solution of it, Snake would have shot him from the dark interior of the flat the instant he recognized the detective.

But Fate was taking better care of the detective than that, as we will presently see.

It was seven o'clock when a large man stepped out of the elevator and came swiftly along the hall toward the open door of the flat in which Snake was seated; and every step of the distance until he arrived at the threshold of the door, he was covered by the gun that Snake held in readiness.

But the short, squat man lowered the weapon then; he had recognized Big Duffy.

"Come in, Duffy," he called, when the other hesitated before the open door. "You won't step on any snakes when you do it. There is only one here, and he doesn't bite."

"That you, Snake?" questioned the other hesitatingly.

"Sure thing, Big. Come on in. Seen any of the others?"

"Nope. For why? Because you never told me who the others were."

"Right-o. And why should I?"

At ten minutes past eight "The Count" appeared, walking gingerly from the elevator to the door and stepping swiftly inside of it without the hesitation that Duffy had manifested; and he was greeted in much the same manner as his predecessor had been.

At a quarter-past nine Ikey, the Jew, glided out of the elevator like a shadow, and an hour later Bob Breaker made his appearance.

It was just exactly eleven o'clock when a figure that seemed to belong to a child of not more than ten years, came from the elevator and ran along the hall to the door.

"'The Mouse,'" said Snake, rising and turning on the lights. "We are all here, pals, except the boss, and he will be here presently. Hello, Mouse, you little runt; how are you?" and he picked the small figure up in his arms and stood him upon the table, revealing, as he did so, the face of a man who had reached

the prime of life, but the body of a child—for The Mouse was one of those rare things, a perfectly formed dwarf.

Before another hour had passed, seven men had left that place by twos, and the flat was in charge of an elderly couple of eminent respectability.

And so began the real conspiracy against Nick Carter.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER HAS A HUNCH.

Nick Carter and Patsy were seated together in the study that same evening when Chick entered, shortly after ten o'clock, and stopped just inside the doorway to smile at them; for each was silently pouring over some slips of paper upon which, Chick could see from that distance, circles had been drawn in pencil.

"What is it?" he asked. "A new version of the Fifteen Puzzle?"

"Worse than that—and harder," replied Patsy, without looking up. "But, chief, I think I have got it," he added, passing one of his slips to the detective. "At least, I believe I am rather close to it."

"I can't see but one solution to it," replied the detective. "Let me see yours, Patsy. If we have arrived at the same result we may reasonably suppose it to be the correct one. And we have done that very thing, lad. We have made the number the same, and also the words 'Top Floor.'"

"'T. F.' had to stand for top floor, if there was a number of a house in the thing," replied Patsy. "But how much nearer does that bring us to a real solution of the thing? We don't really know any more about it than we did when we discovered the chalk-marked circles."

"Eh? What's that?" asked Chick, coming nearer, and looking at the pieces of paper that Patsy and Nick had been using. "Chalk-marked circles? What about them."

"The chief got interested in some chalk marks that we discovered on the pavement in Fifth Avenue this afternoon," said Patsy. "We have made rather an interesting puzzle out of it. We've been trying to work out what it means."

"Where did you find them?" asked Chick, showing interest.

Patsy told him.

"That's strange," said Chick. "I found some marks of the same sort, too—only they were different, and in a different place. I wonder if they had anything to do with yours?"

The detective laid aside the slips of paper he had been holding in his hand, and asked:

"Tell us about those that you found, Chick."

"I found them at Twenty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, about an hour ago," replied the first assistant. "There was one on each corner—on each of the four corners, I mean."

"I understand. Tell me all about them."

"One had just a cross inside of a small, white circle—a mark like a multiplication sign; another had a figure eight inside a circle; still another had the figures nine, plus, six, in the same manner, and the fourth circle contained only the letter S."

"What did you think about them?" asked Nick.

"Nothing at all, unless they were made by boys in play, until I saw what you two were up to when I came in."

"What do you think about them now?"

"That possibly the two incidents may be connected."

For a moment the detective was busy with his pencil and another slip of paper, and after a little he looked up, and said:

"Patsy, those four marks that Chick found lead us to the first one that we discovered—only Chick must have read them backward."

"How do you mean?" asked Patsy.

"Well, if we read the letter S first, and after that the figures, we might find that the S means south, and we do find that the figures, all added together, make twenty-three; and we already know that the first circle we found, marked on the pavement, was exactly twenty-three blocks south from there. Only, I don't know what the cross inside the last circle may indicate."

"Probably nothing at all," said Patsy.

"No; if any of the marks had a meaning, they all had meanings. However, do you want to know how I construe the entire thing, lads?"

"Sure," said Patsy. "It's getting me dippy."

"Well, we must take into consideration that a majority of the marks are located along Fifth Avenue, and are discovered on a Sunday. They may have been made several days ago or only lately; the likelihood is that they were made early this very morning. They indicate a rendezvous of some sort, arranged between several individuals, or for the accommodation of several persons who were likely to be widely separated—in prison, possibly—between the times when the ar-

rangement was originally made and the time of its fulfilment."

"Why in prison?"

"The location and the time suggested that idea. Crooks do not frequent the neighborhood of Fifth Avenue, Sundays, and, therefore, are not sought there."

"Won't you be a little more definite, Nick?" Chick asked.

"I'll suppose a case, if you like."

"All right."

"Convicts, while they are imprisoned, frequently form lasting friendships—or partnerships. They agree to meet again when they are both free, but they cannot agree upon a positive locality, because they belong to the class that is hunted; they never know where it will be safe for them to go, or to wait."

"But they can always walk past a corner, eh? Is that the idea?"

"They can always appear at an unfrequented corner, at approximately a given time. For example: You will find directions at such and such a place, on one of the Sundays in a given month. Then, if you go there the first Sunday, and do not find directions, you will go again the second Sunday, and so on till you do find what you seek."

"But why all those marks? Why not 'S-twenty-three,' merely, on one of the corners?"

"Because that is putting all the eggs, figuratively, into one basket. You, or I, in walking up or down the avenue, or through Twenty-ninth Street, might have turned the corner and so have seen but one of the small circles you discovered; or we might have continued along the avenue, or street, and have seen two of them; but that is all we would have seen. There must have been something to have called your attention to each of the four corners, Chick."

"There was."

"I thought so. What was it?"

"A boy. He went to one of the corners and appeared to study something, then he went to each of the others, and did the same thing; and then he shot away down the avenue on a run. I supposed it was some game of his."

"Did he appear first at the southeast corner?"

"Yes."

"Then it follows that he was sent there by one of the persons who wished to read the signs, and who did not deem it prudent to go there to do so. That person sent the boy to read them for him and to tell him what they were."

"If your theory holds good at all, it holds good in that opinion, also."

"I think it has gone beyond a theory, Chick. The signs that we have seen and read, at least, in part, appoint a rendezvous of some sort, for two or three or more persons. I am as sure of that as I am that we are here in this room together."

"And also that one or more of the parties concerned must be lately out of prison?"

"Yes. Wait a moment."

The detective reached for the telephone and placed the receiver to his ear; then he asked for police headquarters.

"How are you, lieutenant?" he said, as soon as he got a reply. "This is Nick Carter. Who has been released from Sing Sing during the last two or three weeks that should have tabs kept on him? I suppose you've got a list there, haven't you?"

"Sure. Do you want them all?"

"No. Only the big crooks; or those who seem most important to you."

"There is Mickey Seeley, called Snake. He was seen, by the way, not far from your own locality, just before dark, this afternoon."

"Where?"

"Fifth Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street, going north."

"Thank you. Who else?"

"Ikey, the Jew, has been out about three months, and has been unusually quiet all the time since then. It suggests that he's got something up his sleeve; but he hasn't done a thing to call our attention to him."

"Waiting for something, eh?"

"Looks that way."

"How long did you say that Snake has been out of limbo?"

"He has been out about six weeks. He has been keeping under cover, too."

"Can you think of any one else who belongs to that kind of a bunch?"

"No. I think not. Say, Nick?"

"Well?"

"Did you see that item in one of the papers this morning, about Billy Peiper? Billy, the slick one?"

"Don't think I did."

"It was in only one of the papers. A store detective, who used to be with us down here, saw and recognized him yesterday. Maybe the fact that he is in town may be of interest to you. There is a tidy five thousand in him, you know."

"Yes. All right. Thank you."

The detective returned the receiver to the hook, and after that he was silent so long a time that Chick finally said:

"Did you make anything out of that conversation with headquarters, Nick?"

"Yes; considerable. I am now trying to argue with myself against my own better judgment, Chick."

"What about?"

"You know I get hunches once in a while. I seem to be under the influence of one now."

"What is it?"

"You were with me when I arrested Billy Peiper, otherwise Slick, when he was sent up for several years, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember what he said to me at the time?"

"Something about getting even when he got out of prison; but they all say that, Nick."

"And Billy Slick usually means what he says. He escaped six months ago, as you know. He was seen in town yesterday. The red-headed bunch of dynamite, called Snake, was seen at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street just before dark—quite near to your chalk marks, Chick. Billy Slick and Snake used to be pals of a sort. Does it mean anything to you?"

"It might, if we carried the idea far enough."

"Ikey, the Jew, is on the carpet, too, and Snake and he are old pals. There are three that fit together rather well. Then, there is another thing."

"What is that?"

"Billy Slick never wastes his time. In prison he would be plotting out what he would do when his term expired, and it would likely be a good plot at that. If he wanted help he would make arrangements with other prisoners—and the intricate manner of these signs is just about the method of procedure he would undertake, to have them find him when he happened to want them. I think we'll take a run down to Fifteenth Street and see if we can surprise a meeting of crooks down there. I think we will do so, if we are in time."

CHAPTER VII.

WALKING INTO A TRAP.

But the detective was not in time, as the reader already supposes, or knows.

It was eleven o'clock that Sunday night when Nick, accompanied by Chick and Patsy, took their way to the house in Fifteenth Street where we have already seen the meeting of the seven crooks.

The elevator had stopped running for the night when they arrived, but the street door was not locked, and they passed inside and walked up the stairs to the top floor; and after much ringing and knocking upon the door of the rear apartment, they succeeded in bringing an old man to it who peered out cautiously at them, and then stepped backward and bade them enter.

"What is wanted?" he demanded, though not unkindly, as Nick stepped forward; and for just once in his life the detective was partially at a loss what to say.

"How long have you lived here?" Nick asked him, motioning for his assistants to wait for him in the hall, and stepping inside the door in order to get a better view of the interior.

"On and off for several years, sir," replied the old man.

"Does any one live here with you?"

"My wife."

"No one else?"

"No, sir."

"I am an officer with authority. I have had reason to suppose that a man made an appointment with others here to-night. Are you willing that I should look through your flat?"

"Perfectly. My wife has retired, but she is an old woman and will not object to your peering into her room if you care to do so. I might resent this, I suppose, but I am getting rather used to it, and I find that the easiest way is the best."

"Getting used to it? What do you mean by that statement?"

"Oh, it isn't the first time that men have come here at all hours of the night looking for somebody whom they never found here. It has happened several times."

"Officers?"

"I didn't say that. No, I should not think so. Men who would not care to meet officers of the law, I should rather imagine. But my wife and I are no longer young, and we have not a thing that is worth stealing, so we put up with it. But there must be some mixing up of addresses, somewhere, or somehow. Come in, sir."

Nick followed him into the flat. He saw at a glance that the old man had told the simple truth in saying that himself and wife were the only persons there when Nick rapped for admittance.

But he walked into the sitting room where Slick had looked over the papers and smoked cigars while he was

waiting for the arrival of Snake, and he saw cigar ashes on the floor, and also a litter of newspapers.

One of these latter caught his eye—merely because he noticed that a short item had been clipped from one of its pages.

He picked it up, noticed the name of the paper, the number of the page, and the position formerly occupied by the clipped item; then he dropped it back upon the floor again.

"I don't suppose you happen to know a man by the name of William Peiper, do you?" he asked of the old man.

"Yes, sir; indeed I do. That is my name," was the instant reply.

The detective turned upon him sharply.

"Where is your son?" he demanded to know; and the old man smiled at him calmly.

"Dead, sir, these many years. He died when he was ten years old; the only child we ever had."

"Your nephew, then, or another man, many years younger than yourself, named William Peiper. You must know such a person. Such a one has been here in this room to-day."

"I'm afraid not, sir," calmly and undisturbed. "I do not know any other person than myself who bears that name, and there has been no person in these rooms with us to-day."

Nick shrugged his shoulders and crossed the room to a morris chair.

He bent over it for a moment, and seemed to gather in his fingers something that he found there; but then he turned away abruptly and strode to the door.

"Old man," he said, before he went out, "I respect your years, if not your statements. I am positive that at least two men other than yourself have been in this flat since dark to-night. One of them was Billy Peiper, otherwise Billy Slick, and the other was a red-headed crook called Snake. But I can see that no amount of questioning would bring forth information from you, so I won't attempt it; but I give you warning that it will go very hard with you if you are known to harbor such men as they are. Good night."

"Good night, sir. Permit me to add that you are entirely mistaken. There have been no men here that my wife or I know about. Good night, sir."

Outside, in the street, Nick paused under a street light and showed to his companions three fiery red hairs that he had taken from the cushion of the morris chair.

"At least two of the men whom I have mentioned to-night have been there, and gone," he said; "and they left nothing behind them only these red hairs, and some newspapers—with an oblong hole cut into a page of one of them.

"That hole, I know without investigating it, once contained an item to which the lieutenant down at headquarters, referred, when he talked with me over the phone."

"Which goes to show that it was cut from the paper by the man most interested in it," said Patsy.

"Yes; particularly when we remember that one of Billy Slick's fads is to preserve all the newspaper accounts in which his name is mentioned."

"I'd like to know where he keeps them," said Chick.

"So would I. If we knew that we would mighty soon know where to find the man."

"Well, what do you make out of this call, Nick?" Chick asked.

"Nothing—only that Snake and Slick are together; or, at least, were together to-night, and are doubtless plotting some sort of a big coup. They are both about the most expert cracksmen in the country to-day. We'll hear of something, presently, I think."

"You haven't an idea that they are plotting against you, eh? You suggested that once to-night."

"No. Life is too short for that. They haven't the time. If there was money to be made out of it they might do it; or if Slick should run across me when my back was turned he might try to do me an injury. He is noted for keeping his word where threats are concerned. But they have probably got other fish to fry, just now."

"Shall you follow up the trail, Nick?"

"There isn't any trail to follow now—unless I set a man to watch that flat. But that wouldn't pay."

"Why not?"

"Because Billy Slick is much too slick to return there until a very long time has come and gone. But he will go back there some time, and if he isn't caught after a few months I'll set a watch on the place."

"All the same, I'd like to capture him," said Patsy. "Not that I want the five thousand dollars—I don't care for that kind of money—but I'd like to be the one to take him."

"Perhaps you will be, Patsy. Go ahead and try, if you like."

That night, after Nick Carter had retired to his own room, he found that he had no desire to sleep, and he got to thinking about the chalk-marked circles and all that had gone with them.

After a while he left his bed and dressed, and a

moment later he entered Chick's room and awakened him.

"Sorry to disturb you, Chick," he said, "but I am going out again, and I wished to give you some directions before I do so. I have decided to get onto the trail of Billy Slick, and I think I know how it can be done."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Chick.

"I want you, when you get up in the morning, to make yourself up to represent me, as you have often done before. Let yourself be seen around town, so that the crooks can spot you and think you are me, if they care to do so. Anyway, I don't want it supposed that I am absent just at present. I shall go out in disguise."

"All right."

"You can work in the open, in the character of Nick Carter, as much as you please, only keep in the open for the present. I won't be away from the house very long; a day or two at the most; but I'm going to turn crook myself for a time. Good night."

And so it happened that if you had been standing in the right place in Madison Avenue, the following morning, at the right time, and had seen Chick come down the front steps of Nick Carter's house, you would have had no doubt that it was Nick Carter himself whom you saw, and probably spoke to, if you were well enough acquainted with him to do so.

But it was Chick, nevertheless, made up in such perfect representation of his chief that their most intimate friends would not have detected the fraud.

It was a method which they had practiced for years, and in which they had become letter perfect.

Often, when Nick desired to absent himself from home, as now, without letting it be known that he was absent, Chick appeared as he did that morning, and the wisest among their acquaintances and friends never knew the difference.

But just now it happened that neither Nick Carter nor his first assistant suspected what was to happen to Chick because of the present masquerade.

The enormity of the plot against Nick Carter could not have been suspected by the detective or his assistant, and when we stop to look at it calmly, who, in his right senses, could suspect such a thing of such hellish ingenuity.

Just imagine taking a man prisoner, binding him or shackling him so that he would be helpless, and then, bit by bit, dose by dose, little by little, injecting morphine into his veins until he should become addicted to it.

Imagine increasing the dose day by day, until the system demanded it, until every impulse of the victim craved it, until the time arrived when he could not do without it, and he begged and pleaded for it when it was denied to him.

Conceive of the terror of his arriving at a point where he could consume from sixty to eighty grains in twenty-four hours and crave for more.

And then, fancy the fiends who had compelled the victim to this lingering horror, selling the drug to him, grain by grain; bickering with him about the price of it, and denying it to him entirely unless he paid the price.

If you want to know what such a horror would mean ask any victim of the terrible drug; or visit, some time, a sanitarium where they are taken to be cured, and almost never are cured.

They will talk about it; they will tell you about it—and it is so awful that the soul of a normal man must stand appalled by such a recital.

And that was the sort of fate to which Billy Slick intended to bring Nick Carter; it was the fate toward which Chick was walking with every moment of the time while he wore the disguise which made him appear in the character of his beloved chief.

But it was all unconsciously on his part; all unknown to Nick, who had asked that he play the part.

And, in the meanwhile, a little way out in the country, within easy reach of the city, at a place where they had gone that Sunday night, Billy Slick and his companions were preparing for the greatest coup on record in criminality—the robbery of no less a person than Nick Carter himself, and that, by extortion.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Part of Chick's duty, when he was impersonating the character of his chief, was to open his letters and to reply to such ones as demanded immediate attention; and also to meet any person who might come to the house demanding to see Nick Carter personally.

Not that Nick always saw people who called upon him, but that in his absence, when he desired it supposed that he was not absent, it was advisable to see such callers, if there happened to be any, in order to keep up the deception.

It was the second morning after Nick left his house, as has been told, when Chick descended to the breakfast table, that he found the letter.

We say the letter, because it was the one which brought about the climax to this story.

It may be said that Patsy was also absent, for he had taken Nick at his word, and was now engaged on a still-hunt for Billy Slick, determined to catch him if it were possible. Adelina, Patsy's wife, had gone with Ida Jones, to the farm in Connecticut for a week's stay and had taken Danny with them in one of the automobiles.

And so we find that Chick was not only master of the situation, but that he was also alone, with only Joseph and Mrs. Peters left to make a household.

There was a pile of letters on the table which Joseph had placed there for Chick to read, and the letter was the bottom one of all, as it happened.

Not one of the others called for more than passing attention, or could wait until the return of the master; but Chick scowled over that last one.

"I'm blessed if I remember the woman," was his audible comment, after he had scanned the letter. Then he read it a second time, and added:

"I suppose it's something that Nick didn't happen to speak about—or, perhaps, as the woman suggests, he may not remember her; or, at least, might not until he received this letter."

He read it again for the third time, and then folded it and put it aside. The postmark showed that it had been mailed late during the preceding evening.

Here is the letter, as Nick Carter was intended to read it; as Chick did read it:

"My Dear Mr. Carter: I hope you will remember me; I fear that you will not; but my father was, in his life, one of your clients and admirers. He has often told me that if ever I needed you, you would come to me upon request. Nevertheless, I would not think of asking you to come to me if it were possible for me to go to you. But, alas! I am a helpless cripple since the motor accident of a year ago, and rarely leave my suite of rooms—so, perhaps, you will make an exception in my case, and come to me. I am in very, very great trouble, and, unless you give me the benefit of your advice and assistance, I cannot tell where it will end, if it ever does. I cannot tell you about it here, but if you will confer a great favor upon one who is practically bedridden and come to me this evening at half-past eight o'clock, I will bless you all my life long.

"My carriage—I haven't a motor—will call for you at your door in time to bring you here. Please do not refuse me. Very humbly, but respectfully,

"Madeline Sergeant Wise.

"October the Tenth."

There was no address upon the paper; evidently the woman, being an invalid, had forgotten it.

The first impulse that Chick had about it was to send word to the woman that Nick Carter was absent from home, and that the letter would be submitted to him as soon as he returned; but then Chick recalled the part he was playing, and realized that he must either ignore the letter entirely, since there was no address to which he could send a reply, or that he must make the requested call.

During the day he read the letter once again, and thought about it several times; and the result of it was that, when evening descended, he had decided that perhaps Nick would wish him to grant what was, after all, a very simple request.

He decided to go.

Shortly after eight o'clock a carriage drew up at the curb in front of the door, and Chick, who had been watching for it, stepped outside.

"Is that the carriage that was to be sent here after Mr. Carter?" he asked, from the top of the steps.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

Chick descended the steps, crossed the walk, and rested his hand upon the handle of the door. Then he paused.

"What is the name of your mistress?" he asked. "Is she Miss Wise, or Mrs. Wise?"

"Mrs. Wise, sir," came the reply.

Chick got inside and closed the door, and then remembered that he had not thought to ask the address to which they were going.

But the carriage started away at once rapidly, the horses going at a brisk trot; and Chick had noticed that they were exceptionally fine horses, that the carriage was perfectly appointed, and an expensive one, that the harnesses were gold-mounted, and that the coachman was in livery.

He had no thought at all that things were not precisely as they appeared on the surface.

Going rapidly, they went up Madison Avenue as far as Forty-fourth Street, and then turned through that street to Fifth Avenue; and at Fifty-ninth Street they entered the park.

Chick, leaning back against the cushions, felt a sense of drowsiness steal over him—and half rousing himself, he discovered that the interior of the carriage was close, and he attempted to lower one of the windows.

It resisted his efforts, and he struggled with it for a moment, feeling unaccountably faint as he did so; but even then it did not occur to him that there was

an odor inside the vehicle more than had been there when he entered it.

He had fancied—only half fancied at that—then, that he smelled chloroform, but it being the carriage of an invalid, he had supposed it was chloroform liniment that caused it, and had thought no more about it.

But now, as he attempted to lower the window, he realized with suddenness that there was all at once a smell of the drug inside the carriage.

He grasped the handle of the door to open that, and found that the door would not open, and he tried to start to his feet, to smash the glass window—only to have his right arm fall helplessly at his side, to know that he reeled and fell, himself, and then to forget everything that was happening.

So insidiously had the drug been administered, with just a taint of it at the beginning, and with the quantity increased so gradually that he was unconscious of it, that he fell a victim to it, practiced as he was, without knowing it.

Had he known it, there were now two men on the driver's box, and behind the carriage, following it closely, was an automobile containing five other men, who were prepared, as soon as the park was entered, to come forward and overpower him if he offered any resistence, or if he succeeded in breaking the glass, or in opening the carriage door.

And in his dazed and weakened state, the result of the chloroform he had inhaled, they would have succeeded, doubtless, in doing it.

But, as it happened, there was no need of that act in the drama.

The expert hand of Billy Slick had so prepared the administration of the drug that it had overcome Chick before he was aware of it, and now he was carried on toward the unknown goal, helpless, unconscious, thoroughly at the mercy of his captors.

They, however, had made just one mistake.

They confidently supposed that it was Nick Carter who was inside the carriage, and, as we know, he was far away from it at that moment, seeking the trail of the very men who had captured Chick.

Once in the park, the carriage came to a stop.

Both of the doors were thrown open by the men from the automobile, and two of them got inside with Chick; and then, as it was driven onward again, with the windows lowered to admit air, these men bound and thoroughly gagged their victim, and deposited him upon the cushions of the seat in front of them.

When Chick came to his senses it was without any idea of the flight of time that had elapsed since he entered the carriage at the door of the detective's house—and, very naturally, he had still less understanding of the reasons that had brought about his present predicament.

His mind worked dully, and his body was filled with nausea; nevertheless, by a great effort, he succeeded in bringing his thoughts to bear upon the occasion when he had been so skillfully stolen away.

His first thought was one of grim humor at his own predicament.

To become such an easy prey, to be such an easy mark for his enemies, filled him, momentarily, with contempt for himself.

But then he remembered that under the circumstances there would have been no other course to pursue than the one he had followed.

He had been left at the house in charge of things; he was to impersonate his chief; the letter had arrived from the unknown woman, presumably, and he had responded to it just as he believed it to be his duty to do.

That was all there was of it.

There had been no circumstance antedating that incident which might have led him, or even Nick Carter himself, to suppose that there was a plot against either of them.

And then, suddenly, it flashed upon his mind that the plot, whatever it might be, could have nothing to do with himself, personally, but was directed against Nick Carter—and in arriving at that conclusion he recalled what Nick had said about Billy Slick, and that fellow's sworn oath that some day he would get even with Nick Carter.

"And so the chalk marks on the pavement, discovered by Nick and Patsy, were the forerunners of a plot against him after all," was what he thought.

He remembered the moment of his entrance to the carriage, and how, at that instant, he had caught the faint odor of chloroform, but had supposed it to be caused by the former presence of the invalid inside the carriage.

Presently, when he had composed himself somewhat, he attempted to rise from the couch whereon he was lying, but found it impossible to do so; and then, as he stirred uneasily in a second attempt, somebody at the farther side of the room, whom he had not noticed, left a chair and came toward him.

It required only a glance to tell him who that person was, for he was familiar with the sharp, keen face, surmounted by its shock of fiery hair.

The man was Snake, and he stepped forward until

he stood beside Chick, looking down at him with a grin on his face, and a leer in his eyes.

"That's a pretty good joke you've played on us, all right, all right," said Snake, "but you may as well know right now that it ain't going to do you any good—or him, either. Instead of working out our little game on Nick Carter, we have amended it so that it will include the other gazabo, too. That's what!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE TRIES STRATEGY.

And now, for a time, we must leave Chick to whatever fate was in store for him for the present moment, and return to Nick Carter, at the time he left the house after his short interview with Nick when the arrangement was made for Chick to impersonate him.

It will be remembered that Nick found it impossible to sleep, and decided suddenly to carry the war into the enemies' camp, if it were possible for him to do so.

All his life Nick Carter had made a study of the habits of individual criminals, so that whenever it should become necessary, he could conjecture more or less correctly upon what any one of them might do under given circumstances.

And the circumstance right here was this:

The crook called Billy Slick had been a convict, sent up for a long term.

After serving less than two years of that term he had succeeded in making his escape, six months before the beginning of this episode.

During those six months no one who had ever known him among the police officials had seen or heard a thing of him or about him, and the natural supposition was that he had been keeping very much in the dark, while he perfected some sort of future plans of operation.

That was one of his pronounced characteristics; to plan thoroughly before he acted.

Another was that the man had always kept very much to himself.

He had few intimates, even among the members of the underworld; none at all, it had been said of him, who entirely enjoyed his confidence.

He had had the habit of disappearing for months at a time, and remaining nobody could guess where, but at all events out of the sight and knowledge of the police—and evidently, at such times, refraining from doing anything at all to attract the attention of the police to him.

Nor was he like other crooks in the habit that most of them have of frequenting certain localities and places when they are at liberty, and there is nothing definite against them.

For this William Peiper, alias Billy Slick, was not like his fellows in the same walk of life.

He was a man of a decidedly different caliber; he held himself aloof from them all, to a degree—and there were others among them who resented this, with the idea that Billy, because of his superior education, and his undoubted sometime gentility, held himself very much above them.

And this was true, although not from the standpoint of his critics.

For the most part the others bored him, merely because of their ignorance and their vulgarity.

Nevertheless, there were times when he did go among them, hobnob with them, and make new friends in their ranks.

But just now would he be inclined to do that thing?

Decidedly not, Nick thought, and the reasons were manifold, chief among them being two:

First, he was an escaped convict with a price on his head; and a very good price, too, the same being five thousand dollars.

Second, the chalk marks on the pavements of the street, and the very evident meeting at the flat in Fifteenth Street between Slick and one or more of his familiars, told of the creation of one of those masterly plans and plots of his; and it was self-evident that while that plan was on the tapis, Slick would keep very much to himself.

But always a person is somewhere; and it was one of the axioms of Nick Carter's life that any person can be found if the right sort of logic is used in figuring out that person's probable condition of mind.

So, when the detective was lying in bed thinking it all over, he asked himself these questions that follow:

1. Why did Slick put the chalk marks on the street, at all?

2. Why had he dared to return to New York City, when there was a price upon him for his recapture?

3. Where would he hide himself away, if he were compelled to remain in the vicinity of New York City?

4. How could he best be trailed to his hiding place?

5. What sort of a plan was it that he was engaged upon? Was it one in his usual line? Was it one of an entirely different character which he had thought out and brought to maturity while he was in prison?

6. Could it be merely in his own line of housebreaking—or what?

The answers to these questions, as he evolved them, were:

1. He put the chalk marks on the pavements of the street because it was his desire to come into contact with several characters of the underworld; not one, or two, or three, merely, but more, and because he had been compelled to make the plans before he was at liberty, this method had been the only safe one: ergo, no less than four or five men, and, perhaps, more, had met together in that flat, Sunday night.

2. He had dared to return to New York when there was a price upon his head, for the reason that the plan he had in mind could be carried out in no other place, and for the added reason that he had doubtless already selected a hiding place when he should do so, which he considered to be eminently safe.

3. He would not hide himself away within the populated portion of the city; probably not in the city at all; but near it; just out of it; at some selected place from which easy and quick access could be had to what he wanted to do—and, therefore, to the city.

4. There could be only one way to trail him to his present hiding place, and that would be found somewhere in Billy Slick's past. He would not select a place of which he knew little or nothing, in which to hide himself; but would more likely hit upon one that he had made use of before, but so long ago that the fact would have been forgotten by his enemies, the police, if, indeed, the police ever had known anything about it. But, it would be a place or a locality that he had known in the past.

5. What sort of a plan or plot was it? Plainly not one of his usual ones, else he would not have gone about it in the surreptitious manner he had done. It was not in his usual line of work.

6. It certainly was not housebreaking, or a cracksman's job of any sort, for then he would have required at the most not more than two assistants. Therefore, it must be a plot against a person. And for what? The answer was obvious—to extort money by some new method that he had devised; and the method, for some reason, required the services of several helpers.

That was as far as the detective had gone when he called Chick and gave him the directions that we know about.

After that he went directly to his study, and to the make-up room back of it, where he devoted himself to one of the most thorough disguises he had ever undertaken.

We will not take the time to go into it in detail; but for the first time in a long while he did not leave his own house by the front door, but made use of the underground passage which leads to the house on Fourth Avenue—and so went out, presently, upon the street, satisfied that no person knew that he had left home.

It was even then still early in the night, from one point of view—from the point of view of the character he intended to play, for it was only a little past one o'clock.

He had gone away from that flat in Fifteenth Street, satisfied and convinced that the old man with whom he had talked knew more than he said he did.

The detective's first idea, now, was to get what information he could out of that old man—whose name, he was convinced, was not Peiper, after all. To pretend that it was had been merely an art of Slick's masterly arrangement.

Most old people are inclined to be garrulous, particularly when two of them are alone together—and Nick figured that if things were as he suspected they were, at the flat, those two old people would do very little sleeping that night.

He figured, too, that of necessity, if they knew Slick at all, they would know, and recognize, on sight, Slick's only pal in the underworld—Snake.

And so it was Snake whom he had imitated in making up as he had done.

He went directly to the flat in Fifteenth Street; he mounted the stairs for the second time that night, and this time he rapped loudly at the door of the flat where the old man had received him earlier.

There was a wait of a moment, and then a voice from inside inquired:

"Who is there?"

"Open and you'll see. You'll know me, all right," replied the detective.

He had never heard the voice of Snake, and, therefore, could not attempt to imitate it; but he had had in his possession two pictures of the crook, copies of others that were in the rogues' gallery, which he had made use of in making himself up.

He meant to play this particular game to the limit, and for what it was worth for that interval, only, and to let the future take care of itself.

The old man opened the door just a little way and peered out.

"I'm Snake," said Nick, in a shrill whisper.

The old man peered at him blinkingly for a moment, and seemed to hesitate; and Nick, by way of hastening his decision, added:

"Billy's in trouble. Let me in."

That announcement proved to be the open sesame.

The door was pulled ajar, and Nick Carter entered the flat for the second time that night.

Nevertheless, the old man did not speak until he had led Nick into the rear room, which was the sitting room of the flat, and the one in which Billy had looked over the papers; and here there was a gas jet burning at full blast—and the old lady was seated over in a corner of the room with a plate of crackers on her lap and a half-emptied bottle of beer on another chair beside her.

"Looks to me as if you're having a party," said Nick, in the gruff tones that he supposed Snake might have used.

"You said somebody was in trouble," said the old man. "Who is it? What can I do?"

"It's Billy, I tell you."

"Billy who?"

"Aw, come off. You know well enough. And I ain't got any time to gossip with you. A cop tried to pinch him out here on the corner, and he had to wing the gazabo."

"Did Billy hurt him much?" the old man asked quickly, before he thought of the significance of his question.

"Well," replied Nick, "people as gets in Billy's way are apt to get hurted; and if he does do any hurting, he isn't very gentle about it. Nothing else will ever hurt that chap in this world; you can bet your life on that."

The old man sighed. Then he asked:

"You are Snake? I think I remember you."

"Yes."

"What does Billy want me to do?"

"He wants the old woman to get together a female disguise for him and take it to—you know where to take it, eh?"

"Yes. I know. The same kind that he used once before, I suppose."

"Yes; the same kind—and you've got to get there with it no earlier than daylight to-morrow—not to-day—and no later than noon. Only, not to-day."

CHAPTER X.

WORKING OUT A BLUFF.

Without another word Nick swung upon his heel and turned toward the door.

It would not do to attempt too much; such a course would have been fatal to what he was attempting.

But when he made as if to leave the flat, his errand done, the old woman spoke up, and in a voice that was sharp and decided. For the first time Nick noticed her particularly, and he discovered then that it was she who was master in that household, and the one, doubtless, upon whom Billy Slick chiefly depended.

The detective had made no mistake in the direction that Billy wanted her to do his errand. He returned a step or two toward the centre of the room.

"Well?" he demanded gruffly, "what more do you want? I have given you Billy's message; what more do you want? I've got to mosey. The neighborhood ain't any too healthy for me, just now. I sent in a swipe of my own when Billy downed the cop."

"What kind of a disguise does he want?" asked the old woman.

"I told you that—a female disguise. He's got to fly the coop."

"What kind of a female disguise?"

"A female—woman disguise, I suppose."

"Is that all he said?"

"I've told you all he said. You're to get the stuff ready, and then take it to him, you know where; at least, he said you did."

"But where is the place?"

"Say, if I knew where it is, maybe a lot of others would know, too. Billy ain't one that's forever telling what he knows; and I ain't one that's asking questions that ain't no business of mine—even if you are, missis."

"I wanted to find out if you knew," she said, with a grim smile.

"Well, you've found out. Want anything more?"

"Yes; when does he want it?"

"To-morrow, between daylight and noon. I tell you; not to-day. Understand?"

"It's a long way there, and I'm an old woman now. I can't start before some time in the forenoon, because I've got to get the stuff together first."

"You can start when you get good and ready. I've done my part of it, and now I'm going to get out of here. It ain't safe around here just now."

"Shall you see Billy again before I do?"

"Aw, what's eatin' you? No. How the blazes will I see him? It's me for Chi, on the first train."

She waited till he had turned toward the door again and his hand was upon it; then she spoke to him once more.

"Was that all the message he sent to me?" she demanded. "Didn't he send me any sign, so that I'd know that you were on the level in bringing it?"

"Naw, he didn't. There wasn't time, anyhow, and I don't know as he'd 'a' done it if there had been. You know me, or ought to. You know that there ain't anybody that he depends on as he does on Snake. Now, you can take that or leave it. So-long."

The old man tried to call him back, but Nick paid no attention, realizing that he had played the part about to the limit, and that a longer delay might be fatal to the success already attained.

Outside the house, on the street, he paused and looked back.

"She will go," he thought to himself; "but the question is, will she start at once or will she wait till daylight? I'll have to give that up—and govern myself accordingly; and, in the meantime, there is another thing that I would like to do."

It will be remembered that Patsy had been in the house and in bed when Nick came away from it after his interview with Chick; and now the detective hurried to the corner of Firth Avenue, found a drug store that was closed for the night, rang up the sleepy clerk, gave the man a dollar to pay for disturbing him, and seized upon the telephone.

It took a little time to get Patsy to the phone, but, when he came, Nick said.

"Now, Patsy, I can't talk very plainly where I am, but you will understand what I mean."

"I'll try to, chief."

"You remember that flat that you and Mr. Chickering and I visited together a week ago last Sunday night, when we found the old man and the old lady so ill?"

"Yes," said Patsy. "That is all right. There must be somebody near you listening to what you say, eh?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'm on."

"Well, the old lady has decided that she has got to go away on a journey, and she may start at most any hour. Now, she is too old to be left to her own devices; there ought to be some one to care for her, and I want you to do it."

"All right. You want me to get on the job at once?"

"Yes; decidedly."

"Any further directions?"

"No; only that it is very important."

"And you?"

"I shall be mighty busy all day to-morrow. The old lady is not likely to start for about twenty-four hours, but you must look out for her until I see you. I'll wait here for you now."

"It won't take long, chief."

It was only a little more than half an hour later when Patsy joined Nick Carter in the street near the entrance to the flat house, and Nick gave him all the information that was necessary for the watch he was to keep.

He concluded by saying:

"I simply threw a huge and gigantic bluff, that's all. It may work, and again it may not. The old woman's caution may get the upper hand, and, knowing that Billy is pretty good at taking care of himself, she may decide that the risk is too great, and so let things slide. On the other hand, she may have swallowed the bait whole, and may start for the hiding place of Billy Slick; and she may not wait till to-morrow. She may start at once."

"In which case I am not to lose sight of her."

"Certainly not. Then, there is another thing."

"What?"

"There may be a way for her to communicate with him."

"Beforehand?"

"Yes; by telephone, or a messenger."

"Uh-huh. I see."

"There isn't any telephone in that flat, and there isn't one in the house that I saw, unless there should be one in one of the flats. But if she telephones she will most likely come outside to do it. So keep watch—and get the number, if she does."

"Sure. What are you up to in the meantime?"

"Headquarters. I'm going to do a little searching down there. No time to tell you about it now. I will come here at midnight, to-morrow—or, rather, to-night."

"And if in the meantime the woman makes a break and I have to follow, then what?"

"Have you got a piece of chalk in your pocket?"

"No."

"Here is one. Make arrows, Patsy, if necessary."

"Suppose I have to ride?"

"If you do, it will be a car. There are some old newspapers in that ash can, over there. Get a couple of them and tear them into little bits. Drop a wad of the small pieces where you leave the car. I'll ride on the platform and see them."

"Suppose it's the subway, or the L?"

"Do the best you can to leave a trail; that is all I can say. I hope to return before she makes a start, for, as she said, she is an old woman, and not one to be alone in the open streets at this time of the night. And then, again, she may have spoken the truth when she said that she would have to get the stuff together."

"There is one thing that you haven't thought about, chief."

"What is that?"

"If she does telephone, or send word to Slick, he'll be wise, and will light out for another hiding place."

"All the better. It will keep him on the run—and if we can keep him on the run, it won't take us long to catch up with him."

"That's no dream, either."

The detective lost no time after that in hastening to police headquarters, notwithstanding the hour of the night it was; and he entered at once the detective bureau.

And here his proverbial luck favored him in so far as his finding present there no less a person than the inspector in charge of it. The inspector had been called up during the night on an important matter, and was on the point of leaving again when the detective entered.

"Gee, inspector," he exclaimed, "it is luck to catch you here. You are the man of all others whom I most wanted to see just now, and the one I least expected to find here."

"I'd have been gone in another minute, Nick. What's wanted?" was the reply.

"I suppose you'd like to put your fingers on Billy Slick, wouldn't you?"

"Sure thing. I've got the net out for him now."

"I knew you had; but I've got a very faint trail of him, inspector."

"Good. A faint trail to you is enough."

"I hope so."

"What do you want of me, Nick?"

"I want you to have brought here to your desk every bit of information you have got in the place that refers, even remotely, to Billy Slick. Everything, mind you. After you have done that you can go away if you want to, and leave me to study it over."

The inspector rang a bell and gave the necessary order—and right here let it be said that very few people suspect how complete is the information on file at the detective bureau, respecting characters like Billy Slick.

Everything that is said or reported about such a person, no matter how trivial in appearance or sound it may be, is jotted down for future reference.

I am sorry to say that this data is not referred to as often as it should be in looking up a man who is wanted; but often the very information that is desired can be found among those files, and they are all arranged now with a card index, so that ready access can be had to them.

"There is a reference to Slick among Byrnes' old records, too," said the inspector, when Nick Carter began sorting the cards.

"Good; that is precisely what I want. It may be the very thing. I will look at that first. But I didn't know that Billy Slick dated as far back as that, inspector."

"It was his first offense, I suppose; the thing that drove him to crime, as the saying goes. I'll get it for you myself. It's locked up in my safe."

And, a moment later, one of the big volumes which Byrnes started to create many years ago, and which, if the system he used had been continued, would have contained in its many volumes the most complete personal records of persons in New York City, that could be imagined, was placed before Nick Carter, and he began eagerly to turn the pages of it.

"I hope you'll find what you want there," said the inspector.

"I have an idea that I will," replied Nick.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAIL GETS WARM.

With the thoroughness that always characterized the work of that great chief of police, Thomas Byrnes, the following entry had been made in the big volume before Nick Carter.

We have used the word entry where the plural would have been more appropriate, for, as a matter of fact, there were many of the entries; but as they all made up the complete statement, we will give them as one; and here it is:

"PEIPER, William Millington, Jr., 16 years old this July, 1888. Has always had a bad record as a mischievous boy who had fits of cruelty. Has been the despair of his father, and of his mother until she died, two years ago. Is wonderfully precocious and brilliant, and has talents that might place him most anywhere, were it not for that crook in his brain which I believe will develop him into a confirmed crook before many years. . . . This matter with which he is charged now is not exactly a crime, but it approaches very close to it, and it might well have been one. On the plea of the father, who has agreed to take the boy out of the city and keep him in the country, I have asked the judge, who will hear the case, to discharge P. on his own recognizance—and his father's, of course. But, nevertheless, I am confident to hear of that lad again—or that my successors in this office will have much to do with him in the years to come. . . . June, later. I hear that over in Jersey, where P. has moved, they are having trouble with the Boy. Too bad. He will end up in prison, no doubt. 1889, January. P. set fire to his father's house last week, and has been again forgiven. At request of the father I went over there to talk with the boy and to tell him what the result would be if he kept on in his evil ways. He only laughed at me. The house is a fine one standing back of the Palisades, above Edgewater."

The detective closed the book with a snap.

He had read enough. He had discovered what he came there to find.

The inspector who had been watching him, smiled.

"You haven't read it all," he said.

"I don't need to, inspector. I have found what I was looking for. I will read the rest of it another time—after I have arrested Billy Slick."

"What did you find, Nick?"

"I have found out where he used to live, when he was a boy; where he lived twenty-one years ago."

"Do you mean to say that you think he has gone there now?"

"I don't know as to that, but I do think it is the most likely place for him to select as a hiding place near the city, just at this particular time. He has got some big scheme on foot, and he would want to keep quiet. What more adapted to that wish than the old home of his boyhood?"

"You say you have discovered where it is?"

"Yes; over in Jersey; above the Palisades; beyond Edgewater."

"That means that we've got to bother with extradition from another State—if you do get your man."

The detective smiled.

"I don't think it does," he said. "I shall go there in my car, if I go at all. If I do succeed in finding Billy, I'll bring him back here and do the arresting after I get to the New York side of the river."

"Kidnap him, you mean."

"Something like that. So-long, inspector. I must get a move on me."

Notwithstanding the information he had gleaned at headquarters, Nick believed that he should spend that day as he had planned, and he did not return to Patsy as he had intended to do. That entire day was passed among the haunts of criminals, instead, and it was not until the following midnight that he sought Patsy again. But Patsy was not there; but on the pavement where the second assistant had been standing when Nick Carter parted with him, the preceding night, there was an arrow drawn with chalk, pointing westward.

Nick halted only long enough to glance at it, then he hurried in the direction it indicated.

At the corner of Third Avenue there was a second arrow drawn in a quarter circle, indicating that they had turned toward the south; and at the corner of Fourteenth Street another one which pointed toward Fourth Avenue.

Following the directions pointed out by the arrows that Patsy had made, Nick came, after a little, to the entrance to the subway, as Patsy had feared might turn out to be the case.

But this fact no longer perplexed the detective. In fact, it made him smile, for he believed that he could make a good guess even then at what station the old woman would leave the subway train—and if he had been asked the question, he would have replied without hesitation: "Manhattan Street station."

He entered the subway, but he left it again a few stations above, and hurried to his garage, and presently he drove out of it in his fastest car and turned north on Broadway.

Nor did he leave that thoroughfare until he arrived at Manhattan Street, where he turned the car toward the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street ferry, to Edgewater and Fort Lee.

And it was not until that moment that he remembered that no boats run on the line of that ferry between the hours of one and four in the morning—and it was then only a little past three o'clock.

For a moment it seemed to him as more than likely that he would find the woman, and his assistant also, waiting at the ferry for the next boat; but when he arrived there he saw no sign of them.

"I know," he told himself. "She has gone by way of the Forty-second Street ferry to Weehawken, and will take the Coytesville car from there. I can wait for this boat and get to the house first, if I don't experience a lot of difficulty in finding it."

But it had been a good many years since the Peipers had lived there, and it was not likely that he would be able to find any person at that hour in the morning who would remember such a family, or where they had lived.

However, there was nothing to do but forge ahead, and when the boat took him over he did not stop to ask questions on the opposite side, but drove the car at once in the general direction in which he supposed the house to be.

That is, he took the Fort Lee road and climbed the hill; and when he was at the top of the hill he remembered, that in the village of Fort Lee there was one person who had lived there a long time and who was reputed to know, by name, every resident in the place for very many years.

Early as the hour was, he drove the car around the corner to the hotel so long owned and operated by the Gerths, and, not greatly to his surprise, he discovered that, although it was not yet quite five o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Gerth was astir, for there was a light in the kitchen of the house.

"How do you do, Mr. Carter?" she exclaimed, when he had rapped at the door and, recognizing him at once, although she had not seen him in a long time. "Come right in, and in a few minutes I will give you some breakfast. Now, do tell me what brings you here at this hour in the morning."

"Madam," he replied, "you remember almost everybody who has lived in this neighborhood for the last forty years, do you not?"

"Oh, I don't know about that. The oldtimers I remember, pretty well; but with all these new people coming in all the time it is hard to keep track of them."

"I know. But it is one of the oldtimers that I wish to ask about."

"Who?" she inquired, stopping in her duties, and resting her keen eyes upon him.

"A family by the name of Peiper. P-e-i-p-e-r is the way it is spelled."

"Alonzo Peiper? There were two families by that name, although they were no relation."

"No. William Millington Peiper."

"Oh, yes, I remember them. They had a son who went to the bad after he had killed both his parents by his bad ways. He was a bad one, that boy. I used to be afraid he'd burn this house down every time he came to it. Thank goodness, he's dead, too."

"Do you think so? On the contrary, he is very much alive."

"You don't tell me! Well, I'd take my oath that you couldn't tell me any good of him, at that."

"And you would be quite correct. Where did his parents live, over here? Can you tell me that?"

"Yes. At a place they bought, back up on the hill, over the Palisades. They named it The Oaks."

"Where is it? How shall I find it?"

"Do you know where the Cooney place is?" she asked.

"No. Try again."

"Well, the Hepworth place, then? Surely you must know that place."

"Yes; I know where the Hepworth place is."

"Well, about a mile beyond it there is a road, now very little used—for a new and better road has been built this side of it—a road that turns to the left through the woods. It is narrow, and grass-grown now, and I'm not sure that a gate hasn't been placed there to shut it away from travel; but that road leads straight to The Oaks, where the Peipers, you ask about, used to live."

"That is not above three or four miles from here, is it?"

"About that. But what are you going to do there? There hasn't been a soul living in the old house for years; at least, so I have been told. And a little while ago some real-estate men tried to buy the place; but they couldn't, because it had somehow fallen into the hands of a man who wouldn't sell. They said his name was Slick."

"Yes, that might be the name," said Nick, with a grim smile.

"You aren't thinking of buying it, are you?"

"No. But I want to find the man who owns it, just the same, and I have reason to suppose that he is there now. I am very much obliged to you, madam, and I'll be going now."

"Not a bit of it. You will have a bite to eat first."

But the detective was far too eager to get on his way to stop to eat anything just at that time, and he hurried back to his car after again thanking his informant.

He was satisfied now that he would experience no difficulty in finding the place, and, although he did not know, positively, that he would find Billy Slick there, he, nevertheless, felt reasonably assured of it.

But little did he imagine what he was really to discover there.

Little did he imagine that Chick had been spirited away, and was, even then, lying in an unconscious condition from which he was presently to awaken to find himself in the power of the very men Nick was seeking.

Several times, along the road, as indicated by his informant, Nick paused long enough to ask questions of chance early risers whom he happened to meet.

But he found the Hepworth place readily enough, although he had not been along that road in a long time; and a mile farther on he came to the place that had been described to him, where an old road turned through the woods—and where a red gate had been built across it to keep people out.

And Nick had now not the slightest doubt that beyond that gate he would find Billy, the slick one, as he was sometimes called.

You can imagine how much more eagerly he would have hastened onward in his quest had he suspected that Chick was even then a captive in the hand of Billy, having been mistaken for Nick Carter—and that already the first assistant had been drugged to partial unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN NICK CARTER GOT THERE.

It may impress the reader that the detective had lost valuable time in spending that day downtown among the haunts of the underworld, instead of seeking at once, and directly, the place in Jersey to which he already supposed that Billy Slick had gone.

But Nick Carter never did things by halves.

Of course, he had no idea, and could not have had, that the very evening of the present, Chick had been enticed away by the carefully laid plot of Slick, and was already in the power of the men who had meant to turn Nick Carter into a morphine fiend.

He had thought it best to use the day in searching all the information he could obtain from certain crooks whom he knew, and who would talk—for a consideration.

And he had learned enough to make him certain that not only had Billy Slick gone into hiding at a place not too remote from New York, but that he had taken with him such redoubtable fellow crooks as The Count, The Mouse, Snake, Big Duffy, and probably two or three others.

And that was how it happened that a whole day passed when neither Chick nor Patsy heard nothing at all of their chief.

It was not that he was so very busy, but that he was so situated that he could not get away, or even send a message, or use a telephone, without attracting undue attention to himself, and that, above all things, he did not care to do.

So it was not Monday morning, but Tuesday morning, when he stopped at Gerth's place to ask the questions he did ask; and, although he had said to himself that he might beat Patsy and the old woman to the place called The Oaks, he was, nevertheless, by no

means certain that they had not started many hours ahead of him, and might, in fact, be there already.

And if the old woman was there, and Patsy had not succeeded in capturing his man, then much of the work would have to be done over again.

He opened the gate that has been referred to and drove his car through it, studying the ground as he did so; but he could not see tracks to indicate that any one had passed that way before him.

There was probably another method of approach to the house, was what he thought; and he drove the car on slowly.

He had gone rather more than a quarter of a mile when he came to a sudden stop, for directly in front of him was an open glade in which were many buildings, a house, a barn, an ice house, and so forth, all of which showed the effects of long neglect.

And there was not a sign of life to be seen about the place.

He had stopped far enough back along the road so that he was confident that he had not been seen, and that the noise of the car had not been heard; so now he dismounted from it stealthily and moved forward on foot, slowly.

He glanced at his watch before he did so, noticing that it was five minutes after six o'clock—for at that time of the year, although it was rapidly getting light, daylight had not fully established itself.

The detective reached the rickety and partly demolished piazza which had once been the pride of the old place and climbed softly upon it, taking care that no board cracked beneath his weight, and became speedily satisfied that if a board had broken in half the noise of it, even then, would not have awakened the solitary sleeping man whom he discovered prone upon the floor in the room into which he peered. For that man, as the detective at once saw, was sleeping the last sleep he would ever take.

There was a round hole in the middle of his forehead, showing what sort of a sedative had been given him. Beyond him was an overturned card table, while the cards, and a lot of poker chips, littered the floor around the body.

Nick tried the window and discovered that it was not fastened. Evidently the men who inhabited the house had no fear of interruption from without.

The detective raised the window softly and stepped into the room. A lamp was still burning on the mantel, above where the card table had evidently been placed, and by its aid the detective searched the features of the dead man, discovering that it was a face which had long been quite prominently displayed in the rogues' gallery at headquarters—the face of a noted crook called Big Duffy.

Probably the caution of Snake, in regard to Duffy, had come true, and the man had lost his temper. If that were so, he had paid the penalty of it.

Nick put out the light and stepped into the bare hallway of the house; and there he paused to listen.

He could hear from one of the rooms on the floor above him, the murmur of voices, one of which was pitched in a high key, and sounded almost like the voice of a child; and another in slow, even, decisive tones, like a master addressing one who served him.

"Billy Slick himself," was Nick Carter's thought, as he moved slowly up the stairs.

But he had not ascended three of the steps before he halted and retreated with more haste than he had begun the advance.

A door above him opened; a man came into the hall—the man with the decided voice, as Nick knew at once when he turned to say something more to the other person in the room.

"You will do exactly as I say, Mouse, or I'll send you where Ikey, the Jew, just sent Big Duffy. I won't have any halfway measures in this affair. Things have got to go as I direct them, or they don't go at all. You and the rest of the bunch made a nice job of it in bringing the wrong man to me when I wanted Nick Carter."

That was all he said. He closed the door with a bang and ascended another flight of stairs which gave upon the floor that was under the mansard roof of the house; and while Nick listened, he heard a door up there open and close, and knew that Billy Slick had entered still another room.

As it happened, it was the room wherein Chick was a prisoner; and, also, it occurred only a very few minutes before Chick roused himself from the stupor he had been in, sufficiently to take notice of things around him.

But Nick Carter knew nothing of all this.

He spent a moment in thought, and then he began ascending the stairs again, determined at whatever cost to follow Billy Slick into the room he had entered, and there to arrest him, or, at least, make him a prisoner, and to let the future take care of itself.

As the case stood, Slick was the only person whom the detective "wanted;" and him he was bound to have.

The detective knew, by the sounds he had heard, which door to approach when he arrived at the top floor, and he found, when he pulled it toward him gently, and softly turned the knob of it, that it had not been fastened after Slick passed through.

And then, as Nick listened, he heard the voice of Slick again, speaking to some one—and then, in utter amazement, he heard the voice of Chick, replying.

For a moment only he stood there, listening, wondering if it could be possible that he was mistaken; but a repetition of the voice, in conversation with Slick, convinced him, and he pushed the door ajar and stepped across the threshold.

There was no sound in the opening of that door, but there was a draft caused by it, and Billy Slick, sensing the difference in the atmosphere, turned quickly—to find himself confronted by the grimly smiling face of Nick Carter, in person.

And Nick was standing, apparently unarmed, although his hands were at his sides, and with the little guns in his sleeves, he was prepared for whatever might happen.

Billy Slick was no coward. And he was a man of resource.

In the instant that he saw and recognized Nick Carter, he realized all that confronted him—return to prison for a longer term than for which he had been sentenced originally, for one thing.

He smiled, showing his white teeth; he reached for a gun and brought it forth quickly.

But that was all. Nick Carter might have shot it out of his hand with one of the small weapons in his sleeves, only he did not have to do so; Slick stood too near to the couch on which Chick was lying to make that necessary.

Chick, weak and dazed as he was, saw the act, and with an effort that was almost superhuman, raised his right foot and kicked out. His toe caught against Billy Slick's right wrist, knocking the weapon from the crook's grasp—and the next instant Nick Carter had seized the man and forced him backward, choking out of him all effort that he made to cry out an alarm.

For a moment—but for a moment only—Nick Carter thought that he had never before so nearly found his match in strength and skill; but the effort that Slick made to fight him was short-lived, even if Chick had not staggered from the couch and thrown his arms around Slick's neck, and hanging his weight upon the man.

In another moment two pairs of handcuffs were snapped upon Billy Slick's wrist and ankles, and he was a prisoner; and, just as that was accomplished, a voice at the open doorway exclaimed:

"You got here ahead of me after all, didn't you?"

It was Patsy who had entered at the doorway; and then, as he uttered those words, he saw Chick, and cried out:

"Where in the world did you come from? What's the matter with you, Chick?" and he leaped forward and caught Chick just as the latter was swaying from weakness, ready to fall.

"Where is the woman you followed?" asked the detective, a moment later, of Patsy.

"She is outside in the car," was the reply. "I saw your car and knew that in some way you had got here ahead of me. It was after I had come in sight of the house, and then overtaking her, to prevent her giving the alarm. We came by way of Hoboken, and Weehawken, Coytesville, and all that; just got here. Who is the dead one downstairs, chief?"

"Big Duffy; a crook."

"Who put him out?"

"Ikey, the Jew, it seems." He turned to the prisoner, and added: "Billy, where are the others? Where is Snake?"

"I'll swear that for just an instant I thought you were Snake, when I first saw you," was the cool reply. "If it had not been for that I wouldn't have been so slow in getting out my gun—and I'd have got you, too."

"That isn't answering my question, Billy."

"What was it? I have forgotten," he replied, with a careless laugh.

"Where is Snake?"

"Gone—where you won't find him."

"Where are the others?"

"What others?"

"The rest of your pals. Where are they?"

"Look here, Carter, if you're looking for information you'll have to apply at some other shop. I'm not giving out any this morning. You probably know that The Mouse is here, and you heard me say that Ikey killed Duffy. You'll have to take that for all you will get. Now, you answer one for me."

"What is it?"

"Who is the old woman you have been talking about?"

"She calls herself Mrs. Peiper; she was in charge of your flat, in New York."

"Great Scott, have you rooted that out, too?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then I will have to look for a new camping ground, won't I?"

"Yes; when you get out of prison again—if you ever do so."

"Oh, I'll do it, all right; and when I have done it I won't have a single occupation on my hands but the exceptional one of looking for your scalp. I'll get it next time, too."

"We will wait till that time comes before we worry about it," replied the detective, with a smile. "Just now we seem to have yours pretty well gathered in—and you were the only person in this outfit whom we were really after. Will you go quietly with me to New York, or shall I gag you and carry you there in the bottom of the tonneau of my car?"

"Oh, I'll go. There is no use in resisting. You'd get me, anyway."

"That's right. I would."

And that same day, late in the afternoon, under guard supplied at headquarters in New York, Billy Slick was sent back to prison to finish out his unexpired term—and some more with it.

THE END.

The story in the next issue will be "A Plot Within a Plot; or, Nick Carter Foils a Master Rogue." The title suggests the complexity of the mystery in the story only in a measure. To solve one brain-fagging problem only to find that it leads directly into a fresh one of greater difficulties, is a pretty severe tax on even as great a detective as Nick Carter. In this great case the operation of the series of plots was conducted by a Napoleon of crime, from a cell in prison, the master mind of the clever criminal reaching out, far beyond stone walls and iron bars, and plitting itself against the greatest of detectives, to say nothing of the world at large. It is one of the most keenly interesting cases in criminal records. Out next week—No. 738.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, February 11, 1911.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.
(Postage Free.)
Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

GEMOND C. SMITH, GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

A TRAITOR UNMASKED.

It was a matter of life and death. It was no mere child's play when men like Doc Wilton and Dan Mortimer—men who had oft looked death in the face and laughed, and lived—refused to tackle the job. Matters at the frontier fort were getting desperate. The redskins were becoming bolder every day, and it was but a matter of twenty-four hours before an attack was made.

Surgeon Major Rowell, commanding the fort, was completely nonplused; there were peculiar circumstances about the case which baffled him. As he sat in the cool shade of his rudely built cabin and gave his whole thoughts to the situation, his brow grew darker and darker, and Sorrel Jim muttered to his rough-bearded chum:

"Guess the surg'n's got somethin' on his mind—hey, Pete? Why don't he send for help?"

Like a shot came the answer:

"Because we can lick the reds ourselves. He's too proud to ask for help. We here kin fight any number o' redskins, Jim, but when treach'ry at home has ter be dealt with, then I reck'n the surg'n may well look troubled."

"What about the mails, Pete?"

"Mails be jiggered! Hain't a man's life worth more'n the mails and a hund'ed-dollar reward? It's more'n a bit o' gold dust ter take them bags an' run the gantlet with 'em through the reds thar. It's thirty mile o' infested country, pard, and it's one man agin' hun'eds. It's sartin death to the man that ventures. No; let's settle the reds' account first; we kin attend ter the letters afterward."

"Zat you, Pete?"

"Hello!"

"Hyurd the news?" asked Doc Wilton as he swung into view, a broad grin on his leathern features.

"I reck'n I hain't," was Pete's reply.

"Torrie's goin' ter take the mails."

"Look hyur, doc, you cl'ar out an' spring them yarns o' your'n on tenderfoots an' greenhorns."

"It's a fact. Torrie has offered ter risk his ha'r an' take the mails on ter Fort St. Edward an' ter bring back the letters from thar."

"An' is the surg'n goin' ter let him go?" Sorrel Jim put in.

"Yes," said doc.

"Then I reck'n the Injuns'll git the letters an' Torrie's scalp as well."

"Waal, it ain't our consarn," doc said composedly as they walked away toward the gate, where a group had already gathered to witness the departure of the daring man.

Although Torrie was generally despised, a cheer broke out as he appeared on the surgeon's own black roan, with the bags attached to the saddle and his repeater across the pommel. The gate was flung back, and, as a cry and a cheer burst forth, the animal bounded forward, carrying its rider from safety out into the unknown danger beyond.

That night the figure of an Indian leading a dark-brown horse crept away from the fort gate and disappeared unseen in the darkness.

Next daybreak revealed two things: the Indians had returned and encamped around the fort, just out of rifle range, and Pete Garner was missing and no one knew of his going. Even the surgeon knew naught of his disappearance, and instinctively it was felt a crisis was approaching. The redskins were waiting till nightfall ere making the attack, and men within kept sober and looked to their shooting irons and cartridge belts, and prepared themselves for the grim struggle that was drawing nigh.

The gallant little citadel had never been taken yet, and each man determined that it never should be.

There seemed a strange calmness over everything, in the air, about the fort, and in the camp of the enemy—a quietness which, in its very intensity, seemed to presage the coming storm.

Night at length fell, and then the reds came swarming to the attack, hurling themselves in all their hideousness on the devoted little band. Every point was assailed at once, and the slaughter of the reds was heavy. Mortimer fell, shot through the heart, as he defended the gate; and Sorrel, only just in the nick of time, pressed the trigger on the red who had the "drop" on the surgeon.

Three times were the reds beaten off, and thrice they came again. This time the struggle was longer and fiercer, but the desperate bravery of the palefaces conquered, and the redskins fell back. With a wild hurrah the haggard defenders realized that they had had enough for that night.

Although no further fighting was expected that night, each man kept at his post, alert and watchful, till the gray morning broke.

Occasionally glimpses of the enemy were seen during the day, but the ensuing night passed without incident. The following day broke dull and stormy, and still there were no signs of the missing man.

"I reck'n Torrie ought to turn up to-day," said Nick Darrell to Jim.

"Turn up!" echoed Sorrel. "I calc'late he has already turned up—his toes," he added, with a grin and walked away.

It was close on four o'clock when a shout from the direction of the gate went up, and as the men looked out over the prairie a horse and rider were seen. A wild hurrah broke out as they were recognized, and a few minutes later men with tears in their eyes were clasping Torrie's hand, while the surgeon himself relieved the foam-smothered roan of the mail bags.

"Bully for ye, Torrie," roared Darrell. "How'd yer do it, Tom? Yer hesn't had a scratch!"

"I'll tell you how he did it," replied a well-known voice; and, as the men wheeled around, the missing man, Pete Garner, was seen sitting quietly on a panting brown.

"Hold that reptile!" he cried, as Torrie, white to the lips, reached down his hand to his belt. Quick as a flash Sorrel wrenched his arm up and dragged him from the back of his horse. The rest looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Yes," repeated Garner quietly, "I'll tell yer how Torrie got through with the mails. It was because the Injuns let him go! Pards, do yer know who 'twas sold us to the reds when we walked into their ambush? Look at thet traitor's face an' read thar."

"How'd yer get through yerself?" Torrie gasped. "I fought me way through, an' you——"

"You lie!" cried Pete. "I followed yer rigged out as an

Injun, and in that disguise, with luck, I did the trick. I've got a letter here written by you ter Red Eagle. I got it from him in exchange for my knife, which I gave him—in the ribs, so's he shouldn't lose it, an'—quick!"

The warning was too late. Torrie, ever light and nimble, had wrenched himself free and had leaped on the back of the surgeon's roan, and was away over the gate on the prairie ere the men could recover themselves.

Up went Pete's Winchester, and his eye glittered along the barrel. Ping! For once in his life he missed!

"After him!" yelled Sorrel to Pete; but Garner shook his head as he pointed to the horde of red demons riding to meet the renegade.

Torrie escaped, but Red Eagle, the prime mover in the attack, was dead, and the fort was left in peace.

Pete still has hopes of some day meeting Torrie, but the surgeon thought more of the loss of his horse.

There was this consolation, though—and, after all, it was no slight one—Toronto Tom did not get that hundred dollars reward!

THE HIDDEN DOCUMENT.

It was a cold, bitter night in the month of December, the snow lay in irregular heaps about the deserted highways, and the winds moaned and howled, tearing over the earth with fury. The street lamps shone but dimly, casting their shadows here and there as the shifting winds decreed, giving a dull brightness to the huge drifts of snow heaped about them.

The clock in the market house chimed the hour of ten, and as its sharp peal gradually died away, a figure but scantily clad emerged from what is commonly called a "tap room," and with rapid strides endeavored to increase the distance between him and its odious allurements. Hardly had he turned the corner of the nearest street, when the door a second time opened, and two figures, muffled in dark cloaks, their hats drawn almost over their eyes, made their exit, and after a brief consultation started on a brisk run in the direction taken by the first. Reaching the corner which he had turned, they halted and gazed up and down the snow-covered avenue.

"He is our man, Terra," said the foremost, in a low, cautious whisper. "Quick, don't lose sight of him."

Again they started at the same pace, at times almost buried in the snow. On, on they pressed, till within hailing distance of the one before them, and in a little while they stood at his side.

"You crossed the ferry but half an hour ago," said he who seemed to be the leader of the twain.

"I did," replied the pedestrian, looking frowningly at his interlocutor. "But what matters it to you."

"Much. I have work for you."

"Work for me—what do you mean?"

"Listen," began the one (called Desmond Peer). "I can see by your pallid face and wasted form that you are almost starving. Aye! I speak the truth, it shows upon every part of your body—but see; here is gold; if you follow my directions I will make you wealthy."

"Make me wealthy?" gasped the wayfarer. "What would you have me do?"

"This is no place to tell you," returned Desmond. "Mark what I have to say now, be here this time to-morrow night. This person"—pointing to Terra—"will conduct you to my home—there I will impart to you my plans. If you accede, well and good, if not—well, no harm shall come to you at the least. What say you?"

"I will be here."

"You will? Then your fortune is made."

A sickly smile passed over the wayfarer's face. Desmond noticed it, and said:

"You think I am not serious; here, to show that I am in earnest, take this money—it will relieve your present wants."

He clutched the purse in his taboulike fingers, and quickly stowed it away in his ragged apparel.

"May I depend on you?" asked Desmond.

"As on the morrow's light," replied the beggar.

"Very well; you shall not be the loser, my word for it. Come, Terra, let us away! Recollect," he said, addressing the mendicant, "at ten to-morrow night."

They parted. The two to repair to a home of luxury—the one to a miserable hut, there to ponder over the strange event which had befallen him.

Twenty-four hours passed, and Desmond Peer was seated in his sumptuous library, eagerly counting the moments as they sped on. He was a strange-looking being; as strange as the events connected with his life. At his father's death, being the eldest son, he succeeded to the estate. This was talked about to no little degree by the gossiping portion of the villagers, and many a serious sage shook his head, and muttered something about a will which ought to have been brought to light, but which never was. The youngest son, Leonard, mysteriously disappeared after his father's death, and of whom no tidings could be had. He being the favorite son, various rumors became prevalent, predicting dark deeds, but having no foundation, they gradually died away.

"A stranger wishes to see you below, Mr. Desmond," said a voice outside the library door.

"Is Don Terra with him? If so, admit him."

Felix the servant, bowed in assent, and withdrew.

In a short while the shivering, half-clad mendicant entered the room, and kept his eyes upon the floor, as if fearing to venture a glance about him. Desmond turned the key in the door, and drew down the curtains. For the first time he obtained a full view of the beggar's face, and as he gazed upon the pale, marblelike features he staggered and clutched at a chair for support.

"Heavens! what a likeness!" he gasped. "Man, who are you—tell me, who and what are you?"

Not by a gesture nor look did the one before him betray any emotion, but keeping his eyes to the ground, he replied:

"I am a poor, unfortunate being, sir, depending upon the charity of a cold world for——"

"Where were you born?" interrupted Desmond.

"In Belfast, sir."

"Your name."

"My name is Mercutio, I——"

"Never mind, say no more; I have been deceived. Think no more of it, but give me your undivided attention."

A close observer might have detected a smile of triumph upon Mercutio's face, lasting but for a second, and then it changed to the same cold expression. Pressing his icy hands to his burning forehead, Desmond endeavored to compose himself for the task before him. He drew several papers from a bookcase at his side, still keeping his eyes riveted upon the wayfarer.

"Now let us begin," he said, selecting one paper from among the many about him. "But before we proceed further, I wish to impose upon you an oath, simple in itself, yet powerful in its relations to me."

"But why is an oath needed?" asked Mercutio, with a slight show of uneasiness in his manner.

"Merely because I wish to insure myself against all risks. The secret I am about to impart to you is of such importance that I would not trust it to your keeping without some guaranty. All that I desire is your solemn oath not to betray whatever you may see or hear this night."

Mercutio was silent. He studied a few moments, and then replied:

"I give you my oath that I will betray nothing. On my knees, here, I swear it."

"It is well," said Desmond, a gleam of satisfaction spreading over his stern face.

"And now let us to business. I shall tell you in a few brief words all that is necessary, and, in order to make it clear, I must give you a little of my family history. It is known through this village that my father made no will, at

least none could be found. This created no little astonishment, as he was often heard to say that no one should inherit his estate but my younger brother Leonard. To do justice to the dead, I will say that my reckless and dissipated life preyed so upon my father's mind that he discarded me entirely. I knew that the only obstacle between me and this estate was a paper, and, suffice to say, I lost no time in removing it. Instead of destroying it as I should have done, I placed it——"

"Where?"

"In the shroud of my father's corpse."

"Yes, yes, and you would have me get it."

"Precisely," replied Desmond. "But why do you tremble so?"

"It's nothing—only a tremulousness to which I am subject," returned the wayfarer, trying to compose himself. The sudden thought of the dead made me shudder. Go on, what must I do?"

"You must enter the vault this very night and obtain for me the will."

"What will you pay me?"

"Any amount you may name within the bounds of reason," replied Desmond. "Come, be quick, it is hard on to midnight."

"I will do it."

"'Tis well. You shall lose nothing by serving me," said Desmond, arising, and unlocking the door. "Come, tread lightly. I would not disturb the household."

They noiselessly descended the staircase. All was silent as the grave. But one light was burning, and by its feeble rays Desmond discovered a dark figure standing in the shadows of the hall.

"Terra, is it you?" he asked, in a low tone of voice.

"Yes, Desmond," replied the attendant, coming from his concealment. "It's all arranged?"

"Everything. Have you fulfilled my orders?"

"To the letter. The carriage is at hand, and everything in waiting. Are you ready now?"

He looked from one to the other. Mercutio and Desmond nodded assent, and in a short while they reached the open air. The moon was high in the heavens, and Desmond knew he had no time to lose. Giving a few directions to the driver of the coach, they quickly entered, and were soon whirling over the snow-covered earth. On—on they flew, the driver sparing neither whip nor oaths to accelerate his horse's speed. On—on like the wind, leaving nothing but a track of uprooted dirt and snow in their wake. The horses reared and plunged at each successive blow of the whip, but did not slacken their rapid pace. At an abrupt turn of the road the vehicle came to a halt, and only a few rods beyond stood the dark-looking vaults of Bermuda.

The trio leaped from the mud-covered coach, and with Desmond as the guide, soon stood at the entrance. Turning toward the driver, Desmond placed in his hand a few pieces of coin, saying:

"Whatever strange things or sounds you may see or hear, heed them not. Secrete yourself in yonder copse, and if any one passes this way, give a low whistle. On your life, I charge you not to fail."

Then, turning to Terra and Mercutio, he said:

"Follow me, and let not a syllable pass between you. We are treading on dangerous ground."

In Indian file they slowly wended their way by the specter-like vaults.

Again Desmond gave the word to halt.

"Now listen to me," he said, addressing Terra. "Station yourself on this spot, and, if you hear or see anything suspicious, give the alarm. Mind, Don Terra, I have done for you as a brother. I trust you will not desert me in this extremity."

"Never fear for me, Desmond," he replied, with some emotion. "Death alone shall sever my fidelity."

Drawing his cloak tighter about his face, Desmond motioned Mercutio to follow him. With stealthlike steps they slowly pressed on, directed by nothing but the pale beams of the fading moon.

"This is it," said Desmond, drawing up before a huge marble sepulcher. "And now for an entrance."

He drew from under his cloak a large brass instrument, and applied it to the ponderous slab. With trembling hands he rolled back the only obstacle to his happiness. Neither of them could repress a shudder as the damp, chilling air swept past.

"Must I descend this place of death?" whispered Mercutio, drawing back with affright.

"You must!" was the only reply Desmond made him.

"Oh, horrors! My blood freezes within me. Tell me, then, where is this document?"

"The first coffin to your right. You cannot miss it. Here, take this chisel; it will be of some service to you. Quick! I think I hear some one approaching."

Step by step he descended into the cold cavern, where the dead lay, and in a little while was lost in the gloom.

"May I strike a light?" he asked of Desmond.

"No. It might be seen. Be quick! For my sake, hurry. Each moment seems an age."

One, two, three minutes passed, and nothing could be heard but the quick panting of Desmond. He was on one knee; his eyes almost protruded from their sockets; his face was pale and rigid. At each screech of the night owl he almost started from the ground with terror. A noise within startled him. Mercutio was searching for the entrance. In another moment, a face, white and deathlike, came to view.

"The will—did you get it?" whispered Desmond, barring the entrance with his body.

"No. Let me up!"

"Liar! I see it in your hand. Give it to me."

"Away, man! Let me above first!"

"Fool!" almost hissed Desmond, drawing a long, glittering blade from his breast. "I am not to be trifled with. Give me the will, or I will slay you."

"What! Would murder me?" gasped Mercutio.

"Give me the paper."

"I will not. Away, Desmond! You know not what you do. Away, I say! Oh, you are choking me!"

A long, low whistle sounded on the night breeze.

"Oh, horror! I am lost!" cried Desmond. "Some one is coming this way."

With almost a supernatural effort, Mercutio tore himself from Desmond's arms, and leaped into the open air.

"Desmond Peer, for five long years I have sought this paper, and, thank Heaven, it is now in my grasp! Behold!" he cried, tearing his hat and coarse ringlets from his head. "I am your brother."

"Leonard Peer! Oh, fury!"

As quick as thought Desmond sprang upon him, crying:

"You have outwitted me; but either you or I shall not leave this place alive."

At this instant the sharp report of a firearm rent the air, and Terra, covered with blood, fell, almost lifeless, between the combatants.

"Flee, flee! They are upon you!"

Those were his last words. One gasp for breath, and he rolled over a corpse.

"This way," said a voice in the rear, and a squad of men leaped from a small thicket to where Terra lay dead. He was alone, Leonard and Desmond having fled.

Desmond Peer was never heard of after that night.

A new heir claimed the estate, and ofttimes, when seated in his comfortable library, would he recall to mind the vaults of Bermuda, or the fortunes of a night.

SIGNS OF FROST.

Delaware Boy—"Pap, will there be any more skating, think?"

Pap—"Lots of it. The peach buds are out."

LATEST ISSUES

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

The best detective stories on earth. Nick Carter's exploits are read the world over. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

722—The House of Whispers; or, Nick Carter's Quick Solution of a Complex Problem.
723—The Blue Room Mystery; or, Nick Carter in Another Man's Shoes.
724—A Tangle of Clues; or, Nick Carter and the Stolen Money Package.
725—The Men With the Yellow Vests; or, Nick Carter Lands a Big Catch.
726—The Mysterious Woman in Black; or, Nick Carter's Clever Haul.
727—The Great Pool Room Syndicate; or, Nick Carter's Round-up.
728—The Mummy's Head; or, Nick Carter's Egyptian Mystery.
729—The Statue Clue; or, Nick Carter and the Kylman Riddle.
730—The Torn Card; or, Nick Carter's Divided Mystery.
731—Under Desperation's Spur; or, Nick Carter on a Curious Case.
732—The Connecting Link; or, Nick Carter's Solution of a Double Crime.
733—The Abduction Syndicate; or, Nick Carter Against the Short Interest.
734—The Silent Witness; or, Nick Carter's Quandary.
735—A Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Silent Witnes.s Remembers.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The heroes of the stories published in this weekly are dear to the hearts of 60,000 boys. Diamond Dick is a splendid Western character. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

735—Diamond Dick's Wise Action; or, The Great Boontown Robbery.
736—Diamond Dick's Snare; or, The Trail of the Lone Hand.
737—Diamond Dick Takes a Chance; or, The Yellow Peril of Ozalia.
738—Diamond Dick on a Baffling Trail; or, The Secret of the Ivory Hoard.
739—Diamond Dick's Trail to Nome; or, The Old Sourdough's Claim for a Million.
740—Diamond Dick's Wireless Trick; or, The Flight of the White Bird.
741—Diamond Dick in a Perilous Path; or, The Testing of Ne-O-Che, the Hunter.
742—Diamond Dick's Log Team; or, The Trail to the Yukon.
743—Diamond Dick's Race Against Time; or, The Supply Train to Gold Cone.
744—Diamond Dick on the Yukon Flats; or, The Perilous Voyage of the Motor-scooter.
745—Diamond Dick in Dawson; or, The Loss of Sir Lionel's Emeralds.
746—Diamond Dick's Five Against Fifty; or, The Master of the Corn-Dodger Claims.

BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY

All kinds of stories that boys like. The biggest and best nickel's worth ever offered. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

412—From Bootblack to Grandee; or, Charles Manton and Montezuma's Treasure. By John R. Douglas.
413—The Stolen Portrait Mystery; or, Bowery Billy in Bohemia. By John R. Conway.
414—Three Speeds to Victory; or, Motoring for the Borden Cup. By Stanley R. Matthews.
415—The Young Magician; or, Conjuring to Fame and Fortune. By John L. Douglas.
416—The Panhandlers of Essex Street; or, Bowery Billy on the Warpath. By John R. Conway.
417—Motoring in the Depths; or, Raiding the Rebels in a Submarine. By Stanley R. Matthews.
418—Treasure by the Barrel; or, The Cherokee Boom. By John L. Douglas.
419—The Trolley Transfer Grafters; or, Bowery Billy's Counterfeit Chase. By John R. Conway.
420—The Sons of the Rising Sun; or, The Submarine and the Japanese Spies. By Stanley R. Matthews.
421—Fire, Fame, and Fortune; or, Making a Name for Himself. By John L. Douglas.

For sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address on receipt of price, 5 cents per copy, in money or postage stamps, by

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the Weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

.....190

STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs: Enclosed please find.....cents for which send me:

TIP TOP WEEKLY, Nos.....
NICK CARTER WEEKLY, " .....
DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY, " .....
BUFFALO BILL STORIES, Nos.....
BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY," .....

Name.....*Street*.....*City*.....*State*.....

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

When it comes to detective stories worth while, the NICK CARTER WEEKLY contains the only ones that should be considered. They are not overdrawn tales of bloodshed. They rather show the workings of one of the finest minds ever created by a writer.

The name of Nick Carter is familiar all over the world and the stories of his adventures are read eagerly by millions, in twenty different languages. No other stories have withstood the severe test of time so well as those contained in the NICK CARTER WEEKLY. It proves conclusively that they are best.

We give herewith a list of all the back numbers in print. You can have your news-dealer order them or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage-stamps.

444—The Crime of Union Square.
445—A Millionaire Criminal.
446—The Broadway Crook.
447—The Princess Possess.
448—The Cursed Tragedy.
450—Missing; a Sack of Gold.
451—The Great Hotel Mystery.
452—A Play for a Million.
453—The Pear-Shaped Diamonds.
455—Nick Carter's Human Weapon.
456—The Compact of Death.
457—Sir Ralph's Revenge.
458—A Tragedy of the Sea.
461—Nick Carter's Strangest Case.
462—Nick Carter and the Marix-burg Affair.
463—The Millionaire Cracksman.
464—The Mystery Man.
465—Seeing the Sea Robber.
466—The Beautiful Pirate of Oyster Bay.
467—The Man from Nevada.
468—Magney, the Mexican.
469—Gaston, the Dog Detective.
470—The Automobile Fiend.
471—Daniel, the Black Hand.
472—The Black Hand's Nemesis.
473—An Expert in Craft.
474—Nick Carter's Terrible Experience.
475—The Mystery of an Untold Crime.
476—Diana, the Arch-demon.
479—Shadowed in Broad Day.
480—The Tong of the Tailless Dragon.
481—The Padlocked Mystery.
482—Demi, the Dangerous.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds.
485—The Thief's Fortune.
486—The Conquest of a Kingdom.
487—Jaws of the Sharks.
488—A Queen of Inferno.
489—Nick Carter's Strangest Adversary.
490—Three Times in Peril.
491—The Gold Lettered Dagger.
492—That Mysterious Stranger.
493—A Dead Guardian of Millions.
494—The Mysterious Treasure Hunters.
495—The Klondike Bank Puzzle.
496—The "Bad Man" of Nome.
498—Following an Ocean Trail.
499—A Plot from the Clouds.
500—Praxatel, of the Ironarm.
502—Ismailia, the Chieftain.
503—Nick Carter's Earthquake Clue.
504—Nick Carter Among the Bad Men.
505—The Man of Many Faces.
506—A Letter from the Dead.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook.
509—The "Skidoo" Clue of the K. U. & P.
510—The Last of the Outlaws.
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery.
512—A Battle of Wits.
513—Game of Five Millions.
514—Codman the Poisoner.
515—Pluto, the Unknown.
516—The Mechanical Giant.
517—Dorks, the Unknown.
518—A Dangerous Woman.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost.
520—An Automobile Mystery.
521—The Mysterious Stranger.
522—The White Arm of a Woman.
525—The Man in the Doorway.
524—The Plot of the Baron.
525—The Assassin on the Night Local.
526—A Masked Mystery.
527—Clarice, the Countess.
530—An Amazonian Queen.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer.
533—Hung on an Unseen Terror.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery.
537—The Making of a King.
536—The Empire of a Goddess.
537—Sindayah, the Terrible.
538—The Seven-headed Monster.
539—The Queen of the Mask.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang.
545—Black Madge's Vengeance.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights.
545—The Mystery Man's Double.
546—Three Against Fifteen.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers.
548—The Dead Man at the Feast.
549—The House of Secrets.
550—The Lost Bank President.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot.
552—The Dare-devil Crook.
553—A Mystery from the Klondyke.
554—Returned from the Grave.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch.
556—A Mad Man of Montana.
557—The Man from Arizona.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand.
559—Doubled in the Dark.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move.
561—The Prisoner of Northern Russia
562—A White House Mystery.
563—The Great Keystone Clew.
564—The Last of Mustushimi.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House.
566—A Mystery of India Ink.
567—The Plot of the Stantons.
568—The Mystery of Empire.
569—The Syndicate of Crooks.
570—The Order of the Python.
571—Tried for His Life.
572—A Bargain With a Thief.
573—Pedro, the Shrewd Crook.
574—The Mystery of the Empty Grave.
575—The Yellow Beryl.
576—The Dead Man on the Roof.
577—The "Shadow."
578—An Automobile Duel.
579—The Paper Bank Counter Move.
580—An International Conspiracy.
581—Plotters Against a Nation.
582—Miguel, the Female Spy.
583—A Mystery of High Society.
584—A Million Dollars Reward.
585—The Signal of Seven Shots.
586—The "Shadow."
587—A Dead Man's Secret.
588—A Mystery Ship.
589—A Plot Within a Palace.
590—The Countess Zeta's Defense.
591—The Princess' Last Effort.
592—The Two Lost Chittendens.
593—Miguel, the Avenger.
594—Eulalia, the Bandit Queen.
595—The Crystal Mystery.
596—A Battle of Wit and Skill.
597—Vanderdyken, the Millionaire.
598—Madge's Vacation Problem.
599—The King's Prisoner.
600—A Woman to the Rescue.
601—Nick Carter in Japan.
602—Talika, the Geisha Girl.
603—By Order of the Emperor.
604—The Convict's Secret.
605—The Man in the Dark.
606—An Anarchist Plot.
607—The Mysterious Mr. Peters.
608—A Woman at Bay.
609—The Balloon Tragedy.
610—Nick Carter's Strangest Case.
611—The Stolen Treasure.
612—The Island of Pins.
613—The Senator's Plot.
614—The Madness of Morgan.
615—A Million-dollar Hold-up.
616—Nick Carter's Submarine Clue.
617—Under the Flag of Chance.
618—The Case Against Judge Bernard.
619—Down to the Grave.
620—The Fatal Javelin.
621—The Ghost of Nick Carter.
622—A Strange Coincidence.
623—Pallino, A Mystery.
624—A Woman of Plots.
625—A Millionaire Swindler.
626—The Money Schemers.
627—On the Trail of the Moon.
628—The Mystery of Arvory.
629—The Disappearance of Monsieur Caron.
630—An Heiress to Millions.
631—The Man in the Blograph.
632—The Thumb-lock Burglar.
633—The Moving Picture Mystery.
634—The Tiger-tamer.
635—A Strange Bargain.
636—The Red Circus.
637—The Secret of a Private Room.
638—A Mental Mystery.
639—The Sealed Envelope.
640—The Message in Blue.
641—The Mystery of Empire.
642—The Detective's Disappearance
643—The Midnight Marauders.
644—The Child of the Jungle.
645—Nick Carter's Satanic Enemy.
646—The Three Stolen.
647—The Great Diamond Syndicate
648—The House of the Yellow Door
649—The Triangle Clue.
650—The Hollingsworth Puzzle.
651—The Affair of Missing Bonds.
652—The Opium Box Clue.
653—The Taxi-cab Mystery.
654—The Mystery of a Hotel Room.
655—The Tragedy of the Well.
656—The Black Hand.
657—The Black Hand Nemesis.
658—A Masterly Trick.
659—A Dangerous Man.
660—Castor, the Poisoner.
661—The Castor Riddle.
662—The Tragedy of the Mowery.
663—Four Scraps of Paper.
664—The Secret of the Mine.
665—The Dead Man in the Car.
666—Nick Carter's Master Struggle
667—The Adelphi Mystery.
668—The Broken Latch.
669—Nick Carter's Sudden Peril.
670—The Man with the Missing Thumb.
671—Fetuan, the "Fence."
672—A Night with Nick Carter.
673—A Game for Stakes.
674—The Dictator's Treasure.
675—Pieces of Eight.
676—Behind the Mask.
677—The Green Patch.
678—The Snap Thread.
679—The Live-wire Clue.
680—The Vampires of the Tenement.
681—The Policy King Baffled.
682—The Nick of Time.
683—A Life at Stake.
684—Uniting a Secret Thread.
685—The Crimson Flash.
686—A Puzzle of Identities.
687—The Seventh Option.
688—The Vanishing Heiress.
689—The Birth of a Mystery.
690—A Clue from the Past.
691—The Red Triangle.
692—Doctor Quartz Again.
693—The Famous Case of Doctor Quartz.
694—The Chemical Clue.
695—The Phrenology Clue.
696—A Pupil of Doctor Quartz.
697—The Midnight Visitor.
698—The Hand of a Stranger.
699—The Man Who Vanished.
700—The Missing Bride.
701—The Silver Hair Mystery.
702—The Vanity Girls.
703—A Battle for a Million.
704—Written in Red.
705—The Colorado Stain.
706—A Million-dollar Ransom.
707—Tiger-tamer Again.
708—The Tightening Coil.
709—The Bolt from the Blue.
710—The Stockbridge Affair.
711—A Secret from the Past.
712—The Hand Print Brand.
713—A Slick Article.
714—The Jade Riddle.
715—The Knife Thrower.
716—The Ghost of Bare-faced Jimmy
717—The Master Rogue's Alibi.
718—The Diplomatic Spy.
719—The Letter Clue.
720—The Allerton Millions.
721—A Play for Place.
722—The House of Whispers.
723—The Blue Room Mystery.
724—A Ring of Clues.
725—The Man with the Yellow Vests
726—The Mysterious Woman in Black.
727—The Great Pool Room Syndicate.
728—The Mummy's Head.
729—The Statue Clue.
730—The Torn Card.
731—Under Desperation's Spur.
732—The Connecting Link.
733—The Induction Syndicate.
734—The Silent Witness.
735—A Woman of Mystery.
736—The Toils of a Siren.
737—The Mark of a Circle.
738—A Plot Within a Plot.
739—The Dead Accomplice.

Price, Five Cents per Copy. If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, 79-89 SEVENTH AVE., NEW YORK CITY